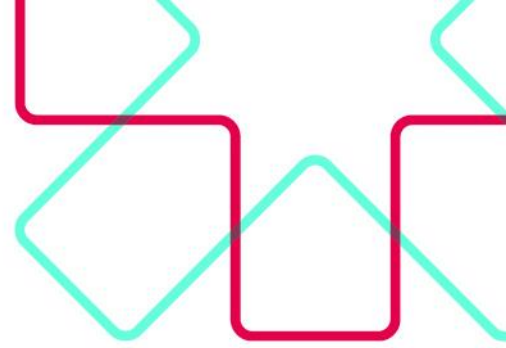


REVIEW OF THE AUCKLAND COUNCIL BUILDING CONSENTS MEETING DEMAND PROGRAMME

Final Report

10 September 2018





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PREFACE

This report has been prepared for Auckland Council (Council) by Doug Martin, Joanna Collinge and Penny Fitzpatrick from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Limited).

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- strategy and investment
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- business improvement
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INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1 Every year, the Auckland Council Building Consent Department (the Department) processes on average around 23,000 building consents, undertakes over 160,000 building inspections, processes 15,000 Code Compliance Certificates and 18,000 Building Warrant of Fitness renewal applications, and checks compliance of 11,000 swimming pool fences.
- 2 In the 2017/18 financial year, backlogs have occurred and the Department's performance against statutory timeframes has declined. In addition, the number of residential units per application has increased by 10% over the past 12 months. The shift from standalone dwellings to medium density/high rise buildings has also increased the complexity of the consenting process.
- 3 The Department's lead team has a Meeting Demand Programme (the Programme), comprising a set of actions to address this situation. The Programme has an action plan, which aims to focus on processes, systems, culture and behaviour change to lift performance.
- 4 An independent review of the Programme is required to ensure that the lead team (and direct reports) are focusing on the key actions that will lift productivity now, and will future proof the Department to deal with the likely increase in demand on its services.

Purpose of the review

- 5 MartinJenkins was contracted by Auckland Council (Council) to undertake an independent review of the Department's Meeting Demand Programme. The purpose of this review is to identify whether the Programme has identified and is implementing the right actions to:
 - lift performance back to target levels, while enhancing the customer experience
 - retain competent people who are required to process and inspect the increase in medium density housing and high-rise buildings
 - future proof the Council to respond to increasing volumes and complexity in consents and inspections.
- 6 Where improvements or gaps are found in the action plan, the Sponsor is seeking appropriate actions that can improve outcomes or address those gaps, in the context of the end to end system of service delivery.

Scope

- 7 The scope of this independent review covers:
 - a review of the Meeting Demand Programme action plan and the progress on implementation of those actions
 - a review of the efficacy of the demand forecast and resourcing model



- high level discussion on factors impacting on the performance of the Department which are outside of the Department's direct control – both internal and external factors
 - recommended actions to be undertaken within the control of the Department that will improve the performance of the Department and will future proof it to respond to increasing volumes and complexity of building consents and inspections
 - any other actions that the Department and or Council may wish to undertake to address impacting factors that are driven from other parties – internal or external.
- 8 The independent review does not cover:
- a deep review of the structure of the Department
 - deep dives into the details of specific processes within the Department
 - general compliance with BCA accreditation regulations (IANZ assessors will examine this during their assessment visit in September).
- 9 A review of the demand forecasting model is being progressed as a separate piece of work as it is not central to the IANZ accreditation process. It will be provided directly to the General Manager.

Methodology for the review

- 10 The review was conducted by an independent team of MartinJenkins consultants. The findings were tested with a reference group prior to completion of this report.
- 11 The review was conducted in three phases:
- Inception and design phase – during which we developed a framework for undertaking the review that would inform the key questions to be answered.
 - Fact-finding phase – during which we reviewed the relevant documents and undertook targeted interviews. Interviews were held with the Department's Lead team, ELT members with relevant portfolios, and selected team members.
 - Analysis and reporting phase – during which we synthesised findings across the various information sourced to identify key themes, conclusions and recommendations, presented the initial findings to the Reference Group, and incorporated their feedback into this draft report for review by the Sponsor. Following feedback from the Sponsor, informed by the Department's Lead team, we will produce a final report.
- 12 Our framework for the review is set out at Appendix 1.



CONTEXT

- 13 The Building Consents Department (the Department) is facing a challenging environment.
- 14 Growth in demand is at its highest for over a decade. Figures published in June 2018¹ showed 1,530 new residential dwellings were consented in May 2018. This is the highest ever figure consented in a month of May, and follows a similarly record-breaking result in the previous month. This brings the total annual consents to 12,274, the highest since September 2004, and only 5% behind the highest ever annual recorded figure. The mix was 46% stand-alone houses, and approximately 27% each for apartments and other multi-unit dwellings. This is regarded as an exceptional result in its own right, and more so because following April's high figure, a month of consolidation would have been more likely.
- 15 On top of this, KiwiBuild may grow demand by as much as 10%, compounded by Housing NZ's ambitious building plans.
- 16 To deliver more dynamic and successful cities, that better meet the needs for housing, employment and amenity, the Government is also proposing that major urban development projects can be built more quickly. New legislation is being considered that will enable local and central government to:
 - empower nationally or locally significant urban development projects to access more enabling development powers and land use rules; and
 - establish new urban development authorities to support these projects where required. The purpose of the UDAs would be to stream-line the resource consent process.
- 17 The current building consents system operated by the Department is not meeting current demand, let alone the anticipated growth. Nor is it agile or prepared for potential changes in the statutory framework.
- 18 Customer satisfaction is at an all-time low, with complaints about timeliness, communication and technical issues. Internal engagement surveys are also poor.
- 19 Long-standing members of the Department feel this is an unprecedented situation. There have been issues to manage in parts of the process in the past, but not across the board.

¹ David Norman, Chief Economist, Chief Planning Office



MEETING DEMAND PROGRAMME AND ACTION PLAN

Review of the Meeting Demand action plan

- 20 The Programme and its supporting action plan is a comprehensive initiative, which appears to include most levers available to the Department. The actions have been developed in the team, drawing on good practice elsewhere, and all have merit.
- 21 Whilst the action plan has a high-level road-map, and there are a suite of projects underway such as a “Backlog Busting team” and improvements to workflow management, monitoring and reporting, we have not cited a detailed implementation plan or evidence of comprehensive implementation. The approach required for implementation is discussed in further detail later in the report.
- 22 The programme is compromised by the sheer number of actions, which are not prioritised, sequenced or integrated.
- 23 The programme is focused on actions in control of the Department, and has an operational flavour. This limits its effectiveness, as success requires ownership and action from other Council Departments.
- 24 The programme is owned and driven by the Department. It would benefit from collective leadership from ELT to support the Department’s efforts.

Alignment with Consenting Made Easy

- 25 We undertook a high-level review of alignment between the Meeting Demand Programme and Consenting Made Easy (CME). The purpose of CME was to provide customers with an easy consenting experience and motivate them to produce high quality applications.
- 26 CME was developed through a 12 week intensive design process involving the Department and customers. It was regarded as best international practice. Following completion of the design, a robust programme of work was planned, a project team established and implementation proceeded over the next 16 months, finishing on 1 October.
- 27 Alignment of the Meeting Demand Programme with CME is not explicit. In addition, the environment now is quite different from that which prevailed when Consenting Made Easy was developed, with more complex applications and record volumes. It is therefore timely to refresh CME and ensure that the Meeting Demand Programme is properly aligned with it.



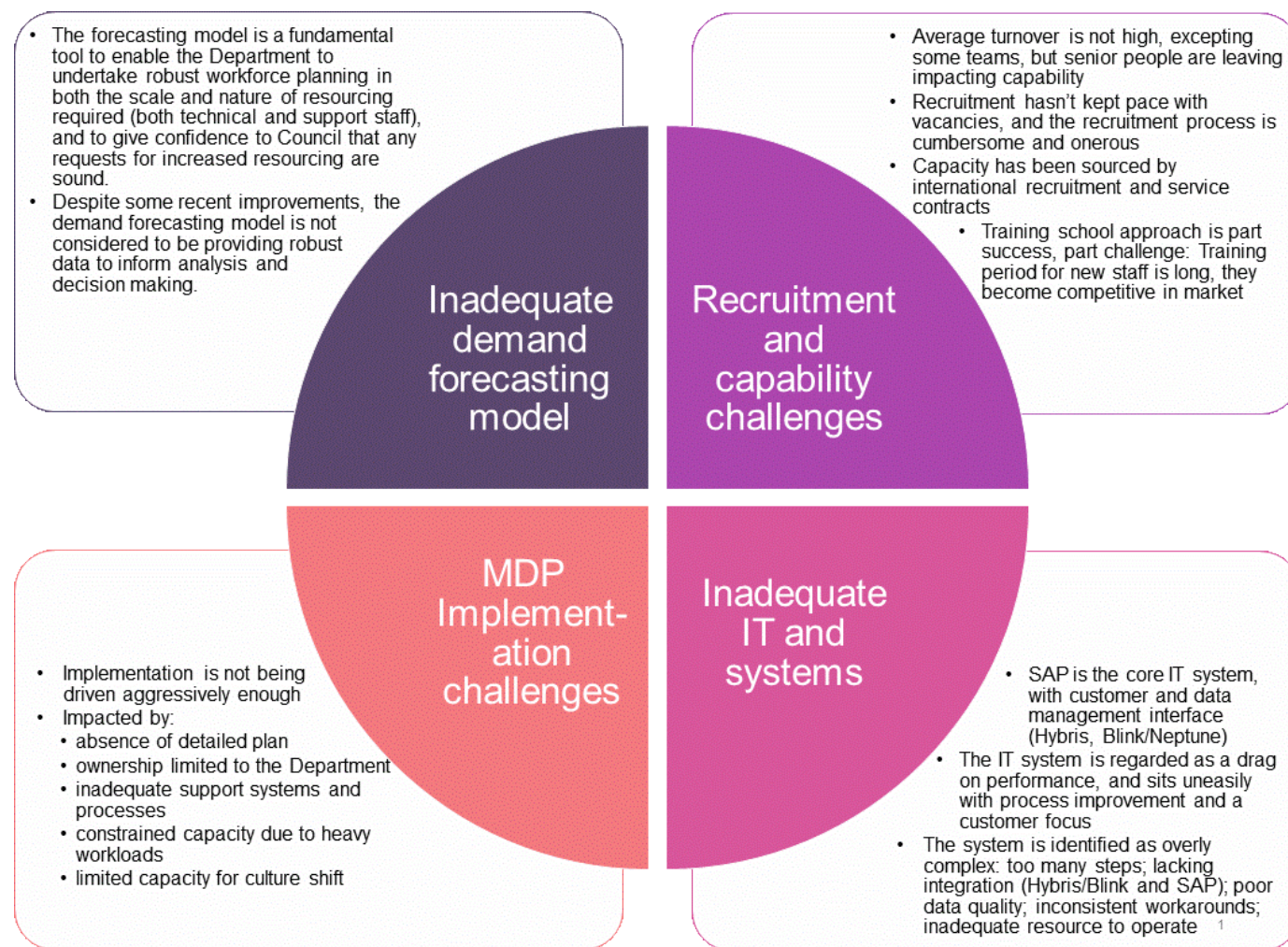
FACTORS IMPACTING PERFORMANCE

Overview

- 28 The Department has grown in capability in recent years. The change in title from Building Control to Building Consent reflected an intent to shift the Department's mind-set to a customer focus. A significant milestone was Future Shape, with the aim of process improvement, customer focus and valuing our people.
- 29 The Department is 80% cost recovery (with about 20% public good responsibilities) and is the best performing revenue department in Council. It also provides a highly technical, regulated service. This makes it unique in the Council organisation, but it is nonetheless expected to comply with Council wide systems and processes that do not always suit its particular business model.
- 30 There are a number of key factors impacting on the performance of the Department. In a steady external environment, it may be possible for the Department to accommodate these factors and make iterative improvements. However, given the context described elsewhere, the situation is unsustainable.
- 31 The factors can be summarised as:
- a demand forecasting model that is not providing robust data to inform analysis and decision making, acknowledging that improvements have been made recently
 - challenges in recruitment and retention, exacerbated by a slow and burdensome recruitment processes and the length of time required to train new staff to full capability
 - inflexible and cumbersome IT and support systems
 - very limited capacity to implement identified improvements.
- 32 Each of these factors is discussed in further detail below, and summarised in Figure 1, over page.



Figure 1: Summary of four key factors impacting performance



Demand forecasting model

- 33 The forecasting model is a fundamental tool to enable the Department to undertake robust workforce planning for both the scale and nature of resourcing required (both technical and support staff), and to give confidence to Council that any requests for increased resourcing are sound.
- 34 Despite some recent improvements, the demand forecasting model is currently not considered to be providing robust data to inform analysis and decision making, including on the scale and nature of resource required in the Department.
- 35 A review of the demand forecasting model is being undertaken, and a report containing our advice will be provided separately.

Recruitment and retention

Workforce planning

- 36 A workforce planning model is in place, but is in its infancy, and it is hampered by the lack of a robust demand forecasting model.

Remuneration

- 37 The Department has introduced a competency-based progression system which moves technical staff through the salary steps as they gain qualifications. A similar process is being introduced for support staff. There is also an annual market review of salaries. Whilst in general remuneration is competitive, it does not (and probably cannot) prevent experienced staff being head-hunted by the private sector for project management roles.

Retention

- 38 At 12%, turnover in the Department is not particularly high, although internal moves within Council are not counted in this figure and there are some areas with higher turnover such as in the Regulatory Support team. The challenge for the Department is that it is the senior and experienced people who are leaving. Consequently, there is shortage of staff with the higher levels of competency.
- 39 Future Shape also resulted in a loss of technical capacity, as it promoted 'doers' to Team Leaders. To assist retention, the management team has started to introduce senior technical lead roles as a career path for technically proficient staff who are best suited to operational roles.

Recruitment

- 40 The Department needs to scale up aggressively to keep pace with current and anticipated demand.
- 41 Recruitment has not kept pace with vacancies, and the Department has accessed other capacity including qualified Canadians and external contracts for service. These arrangements have



assisted capacity, and could be extended with attention to some lessons on how to best manage such initiatives.

- 42 The recruitment process is cumbersome and onerous, and applications to fill vacancies languish at different points in the process. Once the Department has a robust and evidence based workforce plan, approvals for recruitment should be proposed on one business case basis covering all roles.
- 43 The recruitment process across the Department needs to be reviewed and streamlined. In our view, recruitment could be taken out of BAU to a centralised point, with one individual responsible for driving it, and sourcing capacity from a wide range of places in addition to in-house staff. This might include BCAs with capacity, such as Christchurch as post-earthquake demand declines, and overseas jurisdictions that can process consents remotely.

Training and professional development

- 44 The Department has long-standing challenges to recruit suitably qualified staff. In response to this situation, the Department instigated a “grow your own” approach through a training school and the technical competency framework. This has been a success story, although it can take a full year before a new recruit becomes fully competent, and the additional supervision and mentoring takes team leaders away from operational delivery. Once qualified, people are competitive in the wider market and difficult to retain.
- 45 Training of support staff is also a significant investment, given the amount they have to remember and master. It is nine months before they are competent to operate unsupported.
- 46 The Council’s decision to establish its own Training School reflected the historic difficulties in the sector establishing stable offerings for the training of building officials from tertiary institutions. In the context of the Government’s ambitious urban development goals, the Council, supported by MBIE, should consider approaching a tertiary institution(s) with a view to discussing whether the changed climate means that they would be willing to undertake a national training programme for building officials.

IT and support systems

- 47 Historically, Council used the Pathways programme for building consents, but this proved inadequate for the volume of consenting in the Auckland environment. Pathways was replaced by SAP in June 2017. SAP is the core IT system and on top sits the interface with customers and data management. This interface is currently Hybris for consents and Blink for inspections (the latter soon to be replaced by Neptune).
- 48 The IT system is universally regarded as a drag on the performance of the Department, and is unsustainable in its current form. There is a significant volume of backlogs, and the Department is missing service delivery targets for core processes. This has direct implications for BCA accreditation retention, staff engagement, and customer satisfaction levels. It sits uneasily with the process improvement and customer focus of Future Shape and compromises the Department’s aim to increase the proportion of digital applications.



- 49 The situation is compounded by MBIE's decision to re-interpret the legislation so that the statutory clock starts at the time the customer lodges an application, and no longer at the time when an application is considered adequate. MBIE's decision is based on the principle that the clock belongs to the customer, and it is the role of the service provider to ensure they provide adequate information and tools for the customer to provide a compliant application. This speaks to a need to focus on tools and systems to enable customers to provide quality applications.
- 50 Factors affecting performance are:
- poor quality data being entered into the system
 - an overly complex system, with multiple steps and hand-offs, leading to delays, inconsistent workarounds, and double entry points, which can lead to errors. Many of the older experienced staff are finding it challenging to navigate the system
 - the lack of integration between Hybris/Blink and SAP
 - inadequate resource to operate the system.
- 51 The increased time required from support staff in this situation means that they are not fully cost recovery, as expected by the business model.
- 52 The integration of systems (which is scheduled for the end of November) will help, but it will only solve part of the problem. A review of the system for processing consents is also required to streamline steps and increase automation that reduces the risk of human error. This should be undertaken urgently.
- 53 If the current system cannot be streamlined and made to support rather than hinder efficient processing, then consideration needs to be given to using one of the propriety systems designed specifically for building consent processing. It is acknowledged that the Council has made a significant investment in SAP as the enterprise system and that it is natural to protect the central system for very good reasons. However, this need not act to stifle the adoption of innovative business solutions, including adopting where warranted proprietary systems.
- 54 Council has moved to centralise support services into a shared services model that provides business intelligence, finance, and business support. This has struggled to meet the Department's specific and often technical requirements. Expectations are not documented and the Department would benefit from a service level agreement setting out required service standards.

Implementation of the Meeting Demand Programme

- 55 Implementation is not being driven aggressively enough given the challenges of the current environment. Implementation efforts have been impacted by:
- the absence of a detailed, integrated implementation programme plan
 - ownership of the programme being limited to the Department



- inadequate supporting systems and processes
 - constrained capacity due to the already heavy operational workloads across the Department, and the number of vacancies
 - limited ability to shift mind-set and culture when people are so focused on operational delivery.
- 56 Considerable work is required to embed initiatives to reduce demand, such as block approvals across standardised plans, greater self-certification, and targeted inspection waivers for low risk inspections. This requires new processes and supporting documentation.
- 57 In similar vein, the quality of applications has not shown marked improvement, with the result that the number of RFI's remains high. For example, the Qualified Partner programme was introduced without requiring the level of quality to be demonstrated before the partners were let in. The incentive to improve is a better process, but this is complicated by the challenges of meeting the standard of 10 days for consent. Partners that continually fail to meet quality standards should be removed from the programme, and future entry to the programme should require demonstration of the desired level of quality.
- 58 Effective implementation requires an organisation-wide focus, driven from Council leadership. It also requires a dedicated resource, drawn from within the Department and supplemented by outside expertise. This would also minimise disruption and diversions for people with heavy operational and managerial roles. There may also be merit in having an independent member to bring a wider perspective.
- 59 This resource, formed as a project team, would be charged with designing, prototyping, documenting and implementing various initiatives. These should include fully embedding risk-based consenting, and all requisite supporting systems, processes and documentation.



CONCLUSIONS

60 Our review draws the following core conclusions about the current state:

- **The issues are real:** In a steady external environment, the Department may be able to get by – but not in the current environment. People in the Department are working hard, are under pressure, and are feeling tired. Customer satisfaction levels are low.
- **The risks are clear:** The current situation represents a clear and present risk to both the organisation's reputation as a building consent authority and its ability to support building construction activity in Auckland. Ultimately, the situation poses a health and safety risk in that sub-standard applications may inadvertently be approved and/or breaches of consent/poor construction practices missed in inspections.
- Some things are working well:
 - Future Shape has created four service lines that make sense to the industry, although the model is not yet fully realised.
 - The lead management team is cohesive, accessing the levers available to it, and driving productivity improvements.
 - The training programme and the competency framework linked to progression are clear capability-building success stories.
- **Refinements would be beneficial:** The Meeting Demand Programme could benefit from clear prioritisation and sequencing of initiatives.
- **There are four key factors impacting performance:** An inadequate demand forecasting model, recruitment, retention and capability challenges, systems that are not fit for purpose, and limited capacity and tools to implement the actions of the Meeting Demand Programme.
- **Organisation-wide support is needed:** While some responsibility for improvement falls with the Department, other key levers that will enable a step-change are beyond the Department's immediate control.
- **Aggressive action is required:** The situation will not improve unless it is dealt with aggressively. The function needs to scale up quickly, and a dedicated resource outside of BAU is needed to support and drive implementation of the Meeting Demand Programme.
- **This is not a short-term challenge:** The challenge is to meet a long-term trend, rather than to respond to a one-off event. Whilst immediate action is required this must not compromise longer-term sustainability.



RECOMMENDATIONS

61 Our recommendations fall into five overarching areas: summarised in Figure 2, and detailed in the following pages.

Figure 2: Five overarching recommendations for Building Consents going forward

1. MDP refined	2. Forecasting	2. Recruitment and capability	3. Systems
Refine and reposition the Meeting Demand Programme	Know what to be ready for	Scale up aggressively	Ensure a fit for purpose IT system, and support systems
- Refresh CME in the current environment, and ensure MDP is aligned with it - Prioritise MDP actions - Identify enabling actions that are the responsibility of other Departments, and incorporate in MDP - Assign responsibility for the implementation of the MDP commensurate with the need to have an organisation-wide focus, supported by the ELT - Design and implement regular, robust monitoring of progress, and report to ELT	Develop and implement a robust forecasting model, informed by our separate review of the model	- Create a centralised recruitment and induction programme, with remit to secure immediate additional resources - Develop a robust workforce planning model - Based on a workforce plan, provide one business case setting out the technical and support roles required - Develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment strategy and campaign to secure in-house staff - Consider approaching a tertiary institution to take over Council's training programme	- Review and optimise the current system for consenting - Implement comprehensive training, monitoring and coaching for staff and external providers - Resolve data integrity and backlog - Assess whether these initiatives have made a significant difference, and if not whether a propriety system should be introduced - Establish service level agreements with depts providing support services, to ensure efficient and streamlined processes that meet required standards
5. Implementation – Set the programme up for success			
Form a dedicated team tasked with driving the implementation of the Programme, with a reporting line commensurate with the organisation-wide focus of implementation.			
- The team would be responsible for designing, prototyping, documenting and implementing various initiatives. These should include fully embedding risk-based consenting, and all requisite supporting systems, processes and documentation. - The team should include experienced staff from the Department supplemented by relevant expertise from other Departments. An external member may also be beneficial, to provide an independent view.			



Meeting Demand Programme

RECOMMENDATION 1 – Refine and reposition the Meeting Demand Programme

- 1.1 Refresh Consenting Made Easy in the current environment, and ensure that the Meeting Demand Programme is aligned with it, particularly Consenting Made Easy's customer centric mind-set and behaviours and its external focus.
- 1.2 Prioritise and sequence Meeting Demand Programme activities that will:
 - reduce demand through risk-based consenting
 - enhance the quality of applications
 - address the key factors affecting performance.
- 1.3 Identify enabling actions that are the responsibility of other Departments, and incorporate into the Meeting Demand Programme with responsibility assigned to or shared with the relevant Department
- 1.4 Assign responsibility for the implementation of the Meeting Demand Programme commensurate with the need to have an organisation-wide focus, supported by the ELT.
- 1.5 Design and implement regular, robust monitoring of progress and report to ELT.

Forecasting

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Know what to be ready for

- 2.1 Develop and implement a robust forecasting model, informed by our separate review of the model.

Recruitment and capability

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Scale up aggressively

- 3.1 Create a centralised recruitment and induction programme, outside of BAU, to simplify the process to secure immediate additional resources, including by filing vacancies through national and international recruitment, contracts with other BCAs and overseas jurisdictions with capacity and an expanded pool of contractors.
- 3.2 Develop a robust workforce planning model, which draws on data and insights from the new forecasting model to identify technical and support resources required now and in the future, funded through predicted revenue from cost recovery.
- 3.3 Based on the workforce plan, provide one business case setting out the technical and support roles required. This should stipulate the capacity and competence required to



respond effectively to the predicted long-term growth in the number and complexity of buildings.

- 3.4 Develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment strategy and a recruitment campaign to secure in-house staff.
- 3.5 In the context of the changed climate with Government's ambitious urban development goals, consider, in conjunction with MBIE approach a tertiary institution(s) to take over the Council's training programme, to release Council from intensive in-house capability development, and to provide qualified resource nationally.

Systems

RECOMMENDATION 4 – Fit for purpose systems

- 4.1 Urgently review and optimise the current system for consenting to improve efficiency and productivity, reduce reliance on an elevated support team and to provide a platform for increased digitisation.
- 4.2 Implement comprehensive training, monitoring and coaching so that staff and external providers follow consistent processes end to end.
- 4.3 Resolve data integrity and backlog where there is an implication for BC Accreditation.
- 4.4 Assess whether these initiatives have made a significant difference, and if not whether a propriety system should be introduced.
- 4.5 Establish service level agreements with departments providing support services, to ensure efficient and streamlined processes that meet required standards.

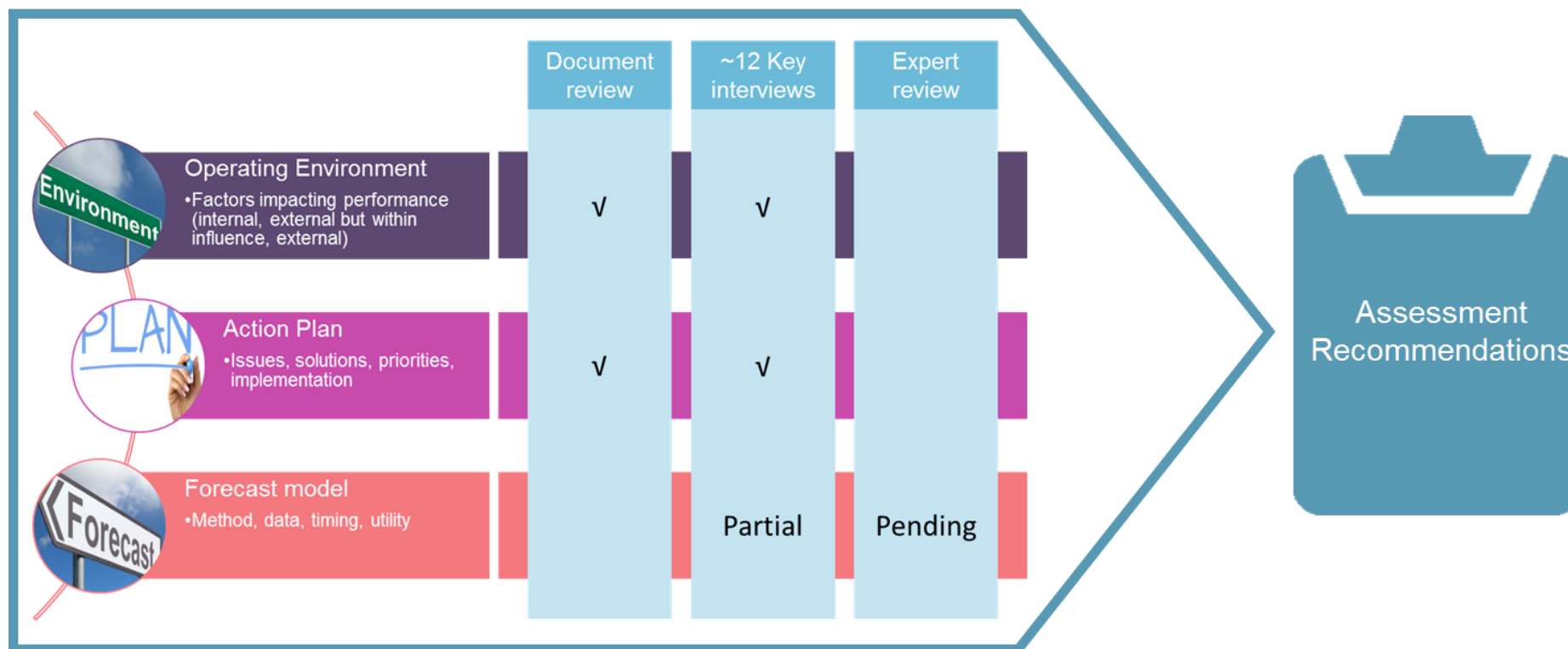
Implementation

RECOMMENDATION 5 – Set the programme up for success

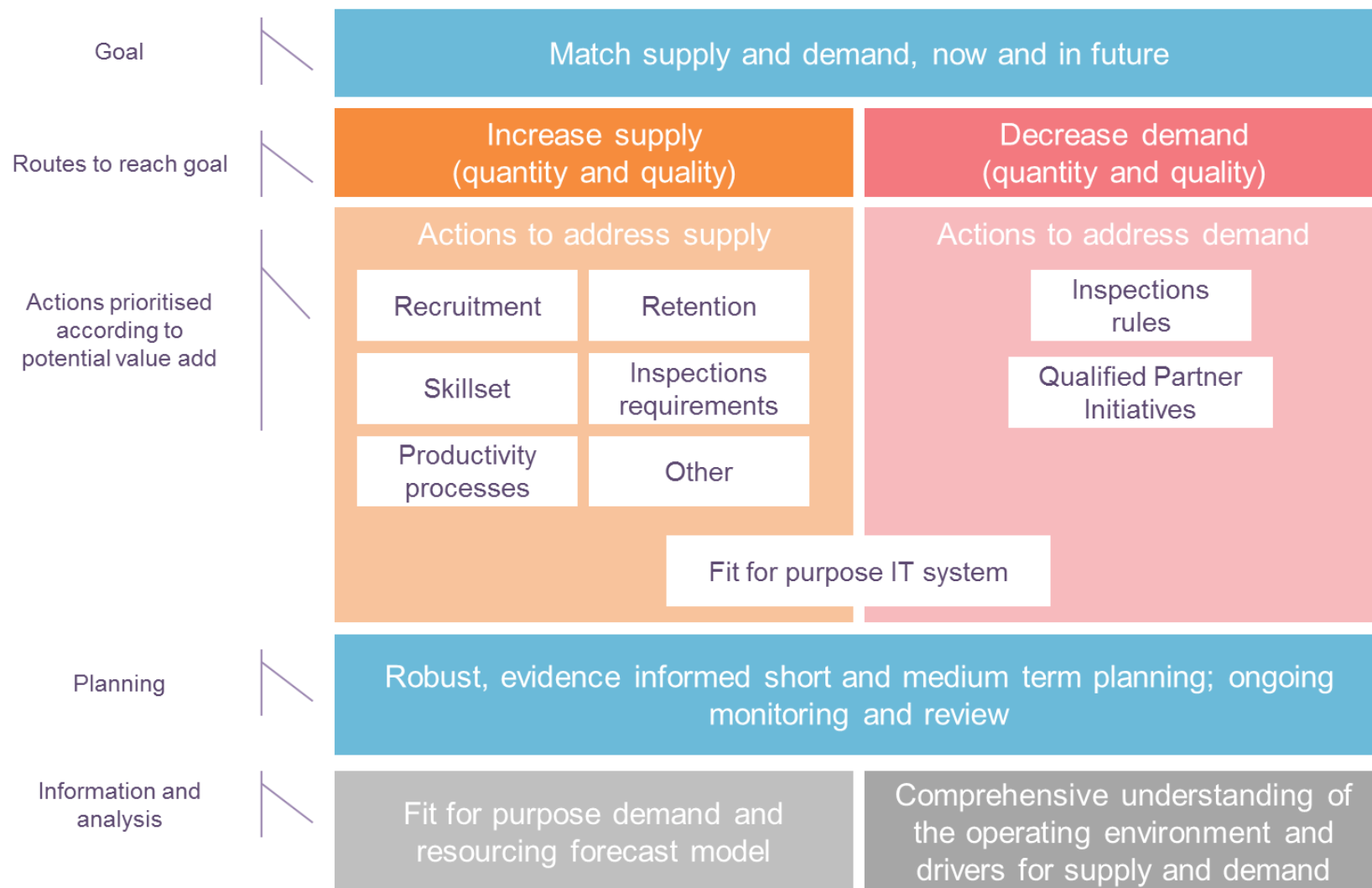
- 5.1 Form a dedicated team tasked with driving the implementation of the Programme, with a reporting line commensurate with the organisation-wide focus of implementation. At a minimum, implementation should be strongly supported by ELT
- 5.2 The team would be responsible for designing, prototyping, documenting and implementing various initiatives. These should include fully embedding risk-based consenting, and all requisite supporting systems, processes and documentation.
- 5.3 The team should include experienced staff from the Department supplemented by relevant expertise from other Departments. An external member may also be beneficial, to provide an independent view.



APPENDIX 1: REVIEW FRAMEWORK



SIMPLE LOGIC MODEL FOR THE BC MDP



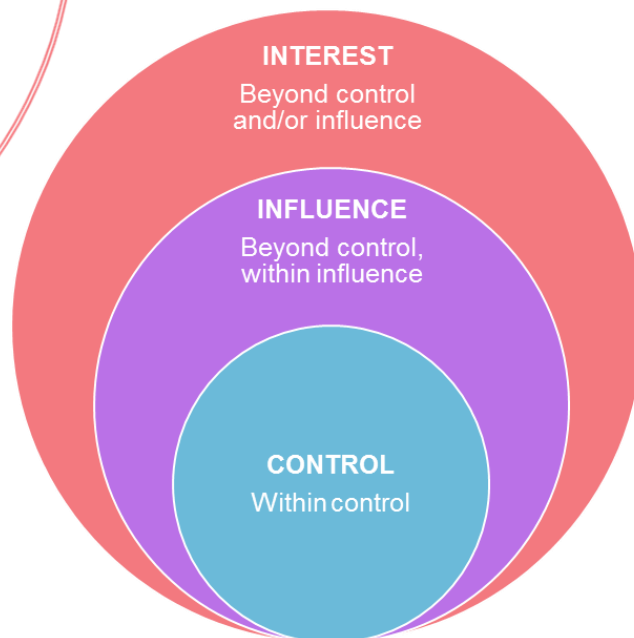


Operating Environment

- Factors impacting performance (internal, external but within influence, external)

Brief for this review

- High level discussion on factors impacting on the performance of the Department – both internal and external factors.



Comments

Many factors will be impacting Department performance. Some of these will originate from within the Department, others from within the council and others from outside of the council. It will be important to understand the nature and magnitude of impact that key factors have, and the extent to which they are within the Department's control or influence. We do not assume a direct correlation between where the factor originates and the degree of control the Department has over that factor. Factors will present both immediate and emerging impacts for the Department.

Review questions

- What factors (internal and external) impact performance of the Department now?
- What factors (internal and external) are likely to impact performance of the Department in the future?
- How well has the department identified factors and analysed their impact? What sources are drawn on? What has been missed?



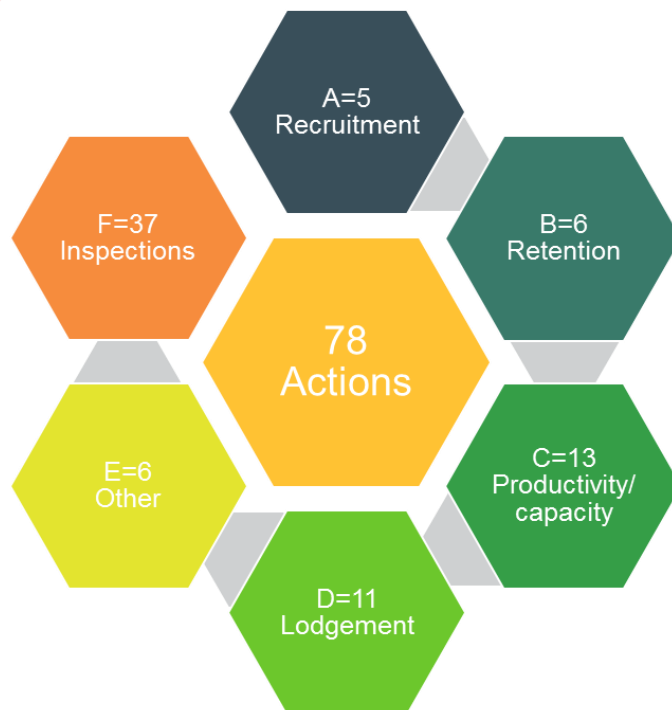


Action Plan

- Issues, solutions, priorities, implementation

Brief for this review

- A review of the Meeting Demand programme action plan and the progress on implementation of those actions



Comments

The actions in the plan should reflect an appropriate mix of actions to address immediate factors and preparation for emergent factors. Each action should be relevant and required. Together the actions should add up to more than the sum of their parts.

Review questions

- What is the plan seeking to achieve?
- Have the right issues been identified?
- Have the right solutions been identified?
- Is the mix of solutions coherent and integrated?
- Are the solutions being implemented as intended?
- What factors are enabling/inhibiting implementation?
- Where is the plan 'working'?
- What else could be done?



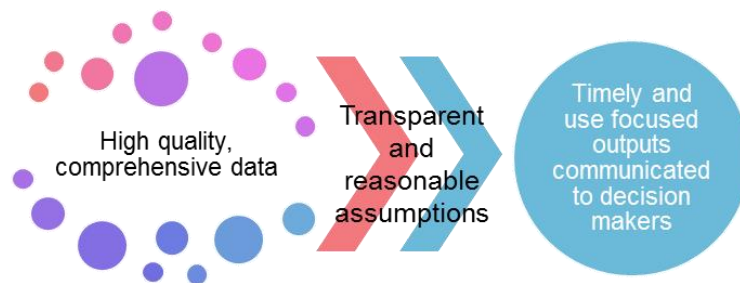


Forecast model

- Method, data, timing, utility

Brief for this review

- A review of the efficacy of the demand forecast and resourcing model



Comments

The efficacy of the demand forecast and resourcing model will be driven by three factors: quality of information going into the model; the quality of the method the model employs (including the appropriateness of assumptions); the timing and utility of model outputs.

Review questions

- To what extent does the model use best practice methodology?
- Are assumptions appropriate? Is degree of certainty clear?
- What data does the model draw from? Is the model using up to date data? What is the quality of the data going into the model?
- Are outputs from the model (and limitations) understood by decision makers? Used to inform decisions? Why/why not?
- Does the model work as an effective tool?

NOTE: the review of the model is to follow





Assessment and recommendations

Brief for this review

- (Three review foci re context, action plan and forecast model)
- Recommended actions to be undertaken within the control of the Department that will improve the performance of the Department and will future proof it to respond to increasing volumes and complexity of building consents and inspections.
- Any other actions that the Department and or Council may wish to undertake to address impacting factors that are driven from other parties – internal or external.



Comments

The review is both backward focused (assessment) and forward focused (recommendations).

Review questions

- To what extent has the Department's Meeting Demand Programme identified and is it implementing the right actions to:
 - Lift performance back to target levels, while enhancing the customer experience
 - Retain competent people who are required to process and inspect the increase in medium density housing and high-rise buildings
 - Future proof the Council to respond to increasing volumes and complexity in consents and inspections.
- What elements of the Building Consents Meeting Demand Programme should be kept, discarded, changed?
- What else should the Meeting Demand Programme seek to do to achieve Department goals?

