



Ref: Case Ref: LE19457  
Date: 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Dr Luke Evans MP  
Member of Parliament for Bosworth  
House of Commons  
London

Dear Dr Luke Evans

I write in reply to your letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

The Council continues to improve its performance on planning applications, turning around its determination of minor applications well above the National performance targets. It is important to stress issues raised by the Secretary of State relate solely to this one category of applications submitted to this council.

Following receipt of the letter from the Secretary of State on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023 council officers immediately contacted the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to arrange a meeting to discuss the content of the letter, to reiterate the reasons for the historic performance levels and to explain the positive improvement in performance. This very constructive meeting took place on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Officers have also invited officials from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to visit the council and specifically meet with the planning service, to witness first-hand the positive changes that have taken place in the service and to talk directly to officers. This invite has been accepted. On that basis, there is no requirement for a meeting to be brokered by you with the department.

At the initial meeting with DLUHC officials, they advised that despite the representations made by the council in response to the initial letter regarding performance for minor applications, should performance not improve by the end of June 2023 it was likely the authority would be designated. At that point officers were advised that there were no plans to make the letter public, giving authorities time to continue to improve. A decision was then made by the Secretary of State to publish the letter and the letter has then been used in subsequent press releases and social media posts without the current facts regarding performance being established. The negative impact that the promotion of this letter, which doesn't reflect current performance, has had cannot be underestimated. After spending the past year building up the reputation of the service and the morale of staff, this action has had a damaging effect and undermined the hard work that has taken place by officers at every level of the service.

It may be helpful to provide some context and facts around this matter. I note your offer to assist the council, and this could be done by ensuring the facts are understood and communicated.

1. The council has always been transparent about the issues it experienced within the planning service and a cross party Scrutiny review of the service and issues, including performance levels, was publicly reported in November 2022
2. The service faced a huge challenge around recruitment and retention of officers, alongside an increase in the number of applications, resulting in the dip in performance. This is not an issue faced by Hinckley and Bosworth alone and has been much publicised in the national planning press, and is a position recognised and supported by the Planning Advisory Service. I understand that officers have previously briefed you about these difficulties.
3. In the past 12 months officers within the service have worked together to improve performance, reputation, and morale. This has resulted in key vacant posts being recruited to and a turnaround in performance.
4. Press releases and social media posts have implied that the threat of designation is for the whole planning service. This is not the case; it is for minor applications only. The council doesn't face losing control of planning, as has been reported, but should we be designated PINS could process minor applications only, and then only if the applicant chose that route.
5. Whilst the letter refers to performance between October 2020 and September 2022 for minor applications, this does not reflect current performance. Performance for the last two quarters of 22/23 was above the required 70% and is currently over 80%
6. The council would expect that any final decision around designation would be based on performance alone and on the current trajectory this should continue to be above the required level.

The council recognises that excellent customer service is central to all services and acknowledges that due to the unprecedented circumstances previously faced by the planning service, some customers did not receive the level of service they should expect. However, this was recognised, and measures put in place to address issues, which have had positive results.

I trust this letter clarifies the current position regarding this matter. I look forward to you assisting the council, and the officers in the planning service, by ensuring the current facts are promoted.

Yours sincerely



Stuart Bray  
Leader of the Council  
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council