

MEDIA RELEASE

18 June 2012

Performance Audit Report

Development Application and Approval System for High Density Residential and Commercial Developments

Today the 'Development Application and Approval System for High Density Residential and Commercial Developments' report was presented to the Speaker for tabling in the ACT Legislative Assembly by the ACT Auditor-General, Dr Maxine Cooper.

Audit Conclusion (extract only – for full conclusion see pages 6 and 7 of the report)

There has been considerable planning and development reform undertaken by the ACT Government since the 2005 ACT Auditor-General's Office *Development Application and Approval Process* performance audit. Improvements to the underlying systems, processes and policies supporting the development application and approval system have effectively addressed the majority of recommendations made in the previous audit report, while also facilitating better development outcomes for industry and the ACT community.

Notwithstanding these significant reforms weaknesses, that include issues that were the subject of three of the 22 audit recommendations made in the previous Auditor-General's Office report, still prevail. The recommendations that are still relevant from the 2005 audit relate to improvements to administration of the entity referral process and the adoption of Ecologically Sustainable Development principles to individual development assessments. Further weakness identified through this 2012 audit relate to governance arrangements and urban design.

The ACT development application and approval system for high density residential and commercial developments should be improved to support a more transparent and timely process and to achieve more efficient and effective development outcomes for industry, Government and the ACT community.

One Government Approach

A 'One Government' approach is not well reflected overall in the current development application referral process for high density residential and commercial developments. Coordination between the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate and referral entities in processing these development applications needs to be strengthened. The Directorate's business practices generally work well where a development is less complex and where fewer entity referrals are required.

Performance and Governance

The Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate did not meet the statutory processing timeframes of 30 and 45 days for high density residential and commercial developments in the majority (85%) of complex development applications reviewed by Audit. Given that the statutory timeframes for residential and commercial development applications is significantly shorter than what is actually being achieved, it seems that a review is warranted. Existing timeframes, maybe aspirational, rather than pragmatic. More achievable timeframes will provide greater certainty for the community and developers.

Environmentally Sustainable Development and Urban Design

The Directorate has not fully integrated environmentally sustainable development and urban design principles into development application processes for high density residential and commercial developments. This needs to be addressed through the provision of relevant information and guidance for developers, referral entities and Directorate Case Officers involved in supporting the development application process.

Recommendations

The audit made 6 recommendations (see pages 11 to 17 of the report). The Director-General of the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate agreed with 3 of the recommendations and agreed in part with 3 recommendations.

The report

Copies of the report are available from the ACT Auditor-General's Office website, www.audit.act.gov.au and the Office (please call 6207 0833 or go to 11 Moore Street, Canberra).