

Civic Affairs Draft Minute: 25 June 2014

Transfer of Planning Items from Area to Central Planning Committee

The committee received a report from the Head of Planning Services regarding the transfer of planning items from Area Committees to the central Planning Committee.

The committee agreed that a special Civic Affairs Committee would be held on Tuesday 15 July 2014 at 5pm to discuss the specific constitutional impact of any proposed changes.

In response to members' questions the Leader of the Council said the following:

- i. Whilst there was no requirement to bring this item to the Civic Affairs Committee it was felt important that members were given an opportunity to comment on the proposals.
- ii. A full report setting out the proposals in detail would be taken to the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 8 July 2014, and then to Council on 24 July 2014.

In response to the report Councillor Cantrill made the following points:

- i. Area Committees allowed the public to engage with the democratic process at a place and time that suited them – i.e. in the evenings and in their own locality. Planning applications were also heard within in a distinct timeframe – for example between 6pm and 7.30pm.
- ii. The Guildhall could be quite a formal setting for the public and be intimidating for public speakers.
- iii. On average during 2013/14 each central Planning Committee lasted 5 hours and this would dramatically increase with the addition of local planning applications. A mechanism was needed to allow the public to know what time their applications would be heard.
- iv. Raised concern about the quality of decision making at very long meetings and suggested the introduction of a 'guillotine' on the length of each meeting.

In response to the report Councillor Benstead made the following points:

- v. Supported the decision to bring the report to the Civic Affairs Committee for comment.
- vi. Agreed with Councillor Cantrill that a mechanism was needed to allow the public to know what time their applications would be heard. Suggested that this could be discussed in more detail at the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 8 July.
- vii. Some areas in the City were very large. Holding meetings at a central and easily accessible location such as the Guildhall would therefore be beneficial.
- viii. A recent meeting of East Area Committee had 10 planning applications to determine and did not finish until 11.25pm.
- ix. On occasion, due to the large number of planning applications to determine, the East Area Committee had had to reconvene on another date. This confirmed that concerns identified by Councillor Cantrill with regard to timings and lengthy meetings already existed under the current system.

In response to the report Councillor Pitt made the following points:

- i. Raised concern that there would be, on average, between 5 and 15 additional planning applications for each central Planning Committee. This equated to a 200% increase across the year.

The Head of Planning Services thanked the committee and confirmed that their comments would be circulated to members of the Environment Scrutiny Committee.