

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Head of Planning Services
TO: Planning Committee
WARD: All Wards

FEEDBACK ON THE OPERATION OF PLANNING COMMITTEE SINCE OCTOBER 2014

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In 2014 the Council changed the way that planning decisions were to be made. From October 2014 all planning applications requiring a committee decision would be considered only by the main Planning Committee (or where appropriate, the Joint Development Control Committee). The scheme of delegation in the Council's Constitution was amended so that the four Area Committees no longer had responsibility for determining specific types of planning applications.
- 1.2 These changes have now been in operation for over six months and a review and report back on how the first few meetings have functioned was promised at the outset of this change.
- 1.2 Over 96 planning application and other items have been considered by the committee since last October. The meetings have been attended by over 230 people¹ and 142 speakers have used public speaking rights to address the committee about planning items.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Committee notes the feedback on the first seven meetings under the new operating arrangements and agrees that no changes are necessary at the current time; and
- 2.2 That each October an annual report on the overall performance and work of the planning service, including statistics on the operation of the Planning Committee will be submitted for the committee's consideration.

¹ Figures for October and November were not recorded

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 In July 2014 Environment Scrutiny Committee and then Council considered proposed changes to the way that planning matters were dealt with by the council at Area, Joint Development Control and main Planning Committees. It was agreed that from 1 October 2014 Planning applications and enforcement matters would no longer be considered at the four Area Committees.

3.2 In detail the Council agreed:

[1] To rescind the delegation of powers to Area Committees to determine planning applications and enforcement matters set out in paragraph 11.3 of the terms of reference for Area Committees (section 11 of Part 3 of the Constitution) to come into effect from 1 October 2014

[2] To delegate responsibility for determining those applications and enforcement matters to the Planning Committee with effect from 1 October 2014,

[3] To endorse the operating principles for the Planning Committee set out in paragraph 3.10 of this report [The July 2014 reports] and adopting the approach set out in option 1 in the report,

[4] To delegate authority to the Heads of Corporate Strategy, Legal and Planning Services to make changes to the constitution, committee operating arrangements, publications, procedures and any other matters as necessary to secure the smooth implementation of this change, consulting with the Executive Councillor, Chair and Vice Chair and opposition spokes of Planning Committee as appropriate and necessary.

3.3 From the 1st October Planning Committee the following operating principles were adopted:

- The Planning Committee and Development Control Forum to continue to operate on a monthly cycle
- Planning Committee to operate on a single committee meeting format but organised with a three part agenda, arranged as follows:
 - Part One agenda – city wide major items
 - Part Two agenda – city wide items that would previously have been dealt with at Area Committee
 - Part Three agenda – General and Enforcement items
- Agenda timings:
 - Part One – 10.00 am start (including where there is a scheduled member briefing/development session

- beforehand – these will be programmed to start at 9.00 or 9.30 am)
- Part Two – advertised in advance to start no earlier than 1.00pm
- Part Three – to follow on from part two agenda items with earliest start time advertised where this is appropriate
- Breaks:
 - A 30 minute lunch break takes place before the part two agenda is heard
 - There may be a short break between agenda part two and three at the Chair's discretion
 - Other comfort breaks at the Chair's discretion during the meeting
- Where a meeting lasts to 6pm, a vote will be taken as to whether or not the meeting will be adjourned. A decision to adjourn the meeting will also agree the date and time of the continuation meeting which will be held no later than 7 days from the original meeting.
- Public speaking will operate with the addition of public speaking rights on Enforcement items to operate in the same manner as the current scheme provides for planning applications.

3.4 It was also agreed that the operation of the new arrangements would be looked at after 6 meetings to see if any adjustments or changes would be needed. The table below sets out the data gathered on the first seven meetings.

Table 1 – Planning Committee Statistics October 2014 – April 2015

Date of Planning Committee Meeting	Duration of the meeting	Number of Applications considered (Agenda Part 1:Part 2:Part 3)	Number of public speakers	Members of Public attending
1/10/14	10:00am – 3:00 pm	11 items in total split: 2:8:1	12	Not recorded
5/11/14	10:00am – 3:25 pm	19 items in total split:1:9:9	34	Not recorded
3/12/14	10:00am – 3:00 pm	13 items in total split:3:3:7	12	33
7/01/15	1:00pm – 3:00 pm	9 items in total, no part 1 items, the split part 2 and part 3 agenda 8:1	11	15
4/02/15	10:00 am –	11 items in total, split	24	73 ²

Date of Planning Committee Meeting	Duration of the meeting	Number of Applications considered (Agenda Part 1:Part 2:Part 3)	Number of public speakers	Members of Public attending
	4:00pm	2:8:1		
4/03/15	10:00am – 6:30 pm	21 items in total split 6:8:7	32	62
1/04/15	10:00am – 5:00 pm	11 ³ items in total split 5:6:1	17	47
Totals	5 hours 30 mins average duration	96 items	142	230

- 3.5 As Members will see from table one above, the number of planning applications at each meeting has varied with five meetings considering under 13 items and two meetings with 19 or more items. This is in part because the number of major planning applications and enforcement/tree items that need to be considered can vary from meeting to meeting. As the numbers of planning applications being submitted can vary across a year, the sample is not necessarily fully representative of the committee workload that can be expected in any twelve month period. The 1st April meeting also saw the first use of the newly introduced Adjourned Decision Protocol by the council.
- 3.6 The three part committee agenda and clearly advertised start times has helped organise the meeting items, provide some flexibility and signposting for people wishing to attend the meetings. The meeting agenda is also arranged to ensure those items that would formerly have been dealt with at Area Committee (Part two agenda items) are always taken after 1pm. Part three agenda items are now also advertised as having the possibility of being brought forward to be considered in the morning at those meetings where there are only a small number of part one items for consideration. This helps avoid unproductive gaps in the meeting and make efficient use of committee time.
- 3.7 Where there is a complex agenda as at February's meeting it can be difficult to give specific advice about what time agenda items will be discussed by the committee. Whilst it would be helpful for those attending the meetings to have an accurate prediction of when items

² Astra Zeneca Planning Application considered, these numbers include security staff and police

³ Includes first use of the Adjourned Decision Protocol by the Planning Committee

will be discussed, in practice this is quite difficult to do. Committee Managers advise people of the earliest time when that part of the agenda will be considered and this would appear to be the safest advice that can be given at the present time.

- 3.8 There have been no training/briefing sessions in the period before planning committee so far but there are plans to start these in the new municipal year.
- 3.9 One complaint has been received about an item considered by the planning committee in January and this has been dealt with under the council's two stage complaints procedure. The complaint did not relate to the specific operating principles being considered here.

Conclusion

- 3.10 Planning Committee meetings undertaken under the new operating principles has enabled them to be thoroughly tested over the last seven months. Overall the operating arrangements appear to be working well. Some sensible flexibility in agenda ordering has been introduced to make best use of committee time where the number of items to be considered permits this.
- 3.11 Consideration of former Area Committee items have been kept to the afternoon part of the agenda and this appears to strike an appropriate balance of convenience for those people attending for those items and efficient conduct of decision making business by the council.
- 3.12 No further changes to the arrangements as now operating are recommended. Annual reporting of planning service performance as well as the statistics for decision making by the Planning Committee would offer a useful periodic monitoring opportunity in future.

4.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1 Planning Committee is asked to give feedback during the discussion of this item. Officers from Planning and Democratic Services have fed into the preparation of this report.

5.0 OPTIONS

- 5.1 The options are to continue with the arrangements that have been introduced and operated over the last seven months or to ask officers to investigate and report back on the feasibility of further changes.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- (a) **Financial Implications** – As noted in earlier reports approving this change. No additional resource implications have arisen since the change to the committee system was introduced last October.
- (b) **Staffing Implications** – None above those identified last July.
- (c) **Equalities and Anti-Poverty Implications** – None
- (d) **Environmental Implications** – None

Climate Change Impact: Nil
- (e) **Procurement** – None
- (f) **Consultation and Communication** - None
- (g) **Community Safety** - None

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS: The following are the background papers that were used in the preparation of this report:

1. Reports to Environment Scrutiny Committee and Council July 2014

The author and contact officer for queries on the report is Patsy Dell, Head of Planning Services on extension 7103.

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