



To:
Joint Development Control Committee 14 April 2021

Report by:
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RE: Planning Advisory Service Review of Joint Development Control Committee

Wards/parishes affected: All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) jointly commissioned the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to undertake a review of the City Council and SCDC Planning Committees, as well as the Joint Development Control Committee (JDCC) in early spring 2020. This was in the context of the ongoing implementation of the Shared Planning Service including the programme of service improvements, process and procedural alignments associated with it.
- 1.2 The review was delayed by several months until the late summer/autumn of 2020 because of Covid19 and lockdown, as all pending PAS review projects were put on hold at that time. The review of the JDCC has now been completed and forms part of the same PAS report that considered the City Council Planning Committee. The final PAS report is attached to this report as Appendix A.
- 1.3 The review of the JDCC was dealt with on a “light touch” approach basis compared to the review of the City Council and SCDC Planning Committees. The report contains a range of findings, conclusions and recommendations. Some of these are relevant to the JDCC and some are not. Many of these relate to issues that the Shared Planning Service has already identified as part of its service improvement programme such as updating and streamlining Committee report templates, the approach to officer presentations etc. Other report recommendations are already being implemented such as the programme of member development sessions that began in October 2020 for City and SCDC Planning Committees. The JDCC already has a well- established member development programme and pre-application briefings process that have been operating for many years.

- 1.4 Cambridge City Council Planning Committee considered the PAS report on 24 March 2021. A similar process had already been undertaken by SCDC in relation to the PAS Review report of the SCDC Planning Committee. The SCDC Planning Committee considered the report on 13 January 2021. A Planning Committee Development Group, comprising of six members (three from the Planning Committee and three from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee) and relevant senior officers has been set up to oversee implementation of the SCDC report's recommendations.
- 1.5 Only some of the report recommendations are directly relevant to the JDCC as most of the eleven recommendations focus on the Cambridge City Council Planning Committee. The relevant recommendations are highlighted in paragraph 3.5 of this report and most of these are within the remit of the JDCC to take forward itself so this is reflected in the officer recommendation.

2. Recommendations

- i) To note the content and recommendations set out in the Planning Advisory Service report.
- ii) To endorse the implementation of Recommendations R4, R5 and R8 of the Planning Advisory Service Review report with respect to the Joint Development Control Committee as highlighted in paragraph 3.5 of the committee report.

3. Background

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Context

- 3.1. As part of the ongoing implementation of the Shared Planning Service, a programme of service improvements has been carried out by the planning service throughout 2020 and this will continue into 2021-22. Some of the specific improvements have been/will be included in the Service Plan 2020-2021 and emerging Service Plan for 2021-2022. The objectives for the service improvement programme include alignment and streamlining of processes and procedures wherever possible to maximise efficiency, learning from best practice across the country and making best use of resources. The two Councils operate three Planning Committees across the Greater Cambridge area, all of which function in a different way so there is also an opportunity to review best practice across the three Committees. It is within this context that both Councils jointly commissioned the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) in early spring 2020 to undertake a review of their Planning Committees as well as the Joint Development Control Committee (JDCC).
- 3.2. Due to Covid 19 and lockdown which resulted in all pending PAS reviews being put on hold in the spring of 2020, the review was delayed until the late summer/autumn. The review has now been completed and the final PAS report dealing with both the JDCC and Cambridge City Council Planning Committee in the same report, is attached as Appendix A to this report. The review of the JDCC was carried out on a

“light touch” approach basis compared to the review of the City Council and SCDC Planning Committees.

Review Process

3.3. The process carried out by PAS as part of their review included the following elements:

- Review of some virtual JDCC meetings during July, August and September 2020.
- Meetings with the Chair of the JDCC and Planning lead members for both SCDC and Cambridge City.
- Meetings with key Council officers including the SCDC Chief Executive, former City Council Chief Executive, Joint Director of Planning, Assistant Director Delivery, Strategic Sites Delivery Manager and legal officers in August and September 2020.
- Stakeholder engagement meetings with the City Council’s Residents Forum in September 2020 and with SCDC Parish Councils

Report Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

3.4. The review findings, conclusions and recommendations are set out in detail in the PAS report attached as Appendix A. Key findings and conclusions that are relevant to the JDCC include the following:

- Cambridge Council (which provides administrative support for the JDCC) demonstrated a quick response to Covid19 and lockdown by adapting to move the Committees to an on-line platform, minimising disruption to the Committee cycle and putting in place appropriate guidance and information.
- In the context of Covid 19 and lockdown, the JDCC has retained a good focus on public engagement and in maintaining capacity for the public to speak at Committee. The virtual meetings have been well received by customers and third parties who have wanted to participate.
- The JDCC provides an example of good joint working between Cambridge City Council and SCDC and the two Councils demonstrated good commitment to maintaining the Committee when Cambridges County Council withdrew from the Committee.
- The Terms of Reference has been recently reviewed to remove the need for householder and minor applications from being reported to Committee as these had previously been caught by the TOR wording.
- There is clear role clarity and good trust and confidence between members and officers displayed at Committee.
- The Chair recognises that there is an ongoing need for further member development focus on 5 year housing land supply , employment, build out and delivery rates, strategic land use policies in the wider sub-region, outlines, reserved matters and full applications and respective Local Plan policies of each Council.
- Pre-application and other briefings work well and are informative.
- Grouping of issues into themes on complex items by the Chair is a good approach.
- JDCC members should be aware that a different approach is required in terms of the process for consideration of large scale applications compared to smaller

applications considered by the other Planning Committees for the majority of the time.

- Noted that there are no limits to ward member speaking time which is inconsistent with other public speakers.
- There are opportunities identified to improve the customer experience of the virtual Planning Committee process
- Learning from best practice from other Councils indicates an opportunity for further collaborative working between members and officers.

3.5. Eleven recommendations are set out in the PAS report. The ones more directly relevant to the JDCC are highlighted below:

- R4 -Review Scheme of Delegation. Although the Terms of Reference for the JDCC were reviewed in the summer of 2020, the Scheme of Delegation was not and has not been updated since 2013. It is therefore recommended that a Review of the Scheme of Delegation should take place during 2021-22 as part of the wider Shared Planning Service review of processes and procedures.
- R5 -the Committee should receive more regular updates on 5 year housing land supply and the housing delivery test including any relevant appeal decisions.
- R8 -The report recommends that consideration be given to the introduction of member site visits for City Planning Committee and it is recommended that the JDCC consider this as well.
- R9 -Consideration should be given to further improvements to the virtual committee experience in terms of use of technology.

3.6. All the above are within the remit of the JDCC itself to consider, except the virtual committee experience and use of technology which would need to be considered alongside the review of the City Council Planning Committee, as the JDCC is administered by Cambridge City Council. Committee are therefore asked to endorse that recommendations R4, R5 and R8 of the PAS Review report are implemented with regard to the JDCC.

4. Implications

a) Financial Implications

Other than the costs arising from the review process itself, there are no direct financial implications arising from the PAS report, although if some of the recommendations are implemented such as the reduction in the length of Planning Committees and officer reports and presentations, this would reduce the costs running Planning Committee meetings and reduce member and officer time spent on them.

b) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

d) Environmental Implications

None

e) Procurement Implications

None.

f) Community Safety Implications

None.

5. Consultation and communication considerations

Engagement with key members including the Executive Councillors, relevant senior officers and residents groups and Parish Councils took place as part of the joint review process.

6. Background papers

None

List of Appendices

Appendix A –Planning Advisory Service review report of Cambridge City Council Planning Committee and the Joint Development Control Committee completed January 2021

Inspection of papers

If you have a query on the report please contact Sharon Brown.