



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

**GREATER CAMBRIDGE SHARED PLANNING SERVICE
PLANNING COMMITTEE REVIEW
SCHEME OF DELEGATION 12 MONTH REVIEW**

Planning Committee Date June 2026

Report to Cambridge City Council Planning Committee
South Cambridgeshire District Council Planning
Committee
Joint Development Management Planning
Committee

Report By Joint Director of Planning and Economic
Development

Ward / Parishes affected All

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Members will recall that during 2024 a joint member and officer project was set up to review the effectiveness of the three Planning Committees which the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service serves. This resulted in some 49 recommended changes. The recommended changes that were made included changes to the schemes of delegation for each of the committees as follows:
- Creation of one Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service Scheme of delegation.
 - Reviewing the types of applications that can be brought to committee, allowing Members to focus upon the more complex, significant and controversial applications.
 - Aligning the triggers for committee referral
 - Introducing a Delegation Panel for Cambridge City Committee and Joint Development Management Committee.
 - Review and align triggers for the existing Delegation Panel
 - Name Change for Joint Development Control Committee (JDCC) to Joint Development Management Committee (JDMC)
- 1.2 The Committee Review Steering group also recommended changes to the Public Speaking arrangements at Planning Committee which has been updated and implemented for all Planning Committees.
- 1.3 In addition, the Committee Review Steering group also recommended a Members Planning Good Practice Guide for Planning which has been produced for all members and adopted.
- 1.4 This report sets out the impact these changes have had on planning committee processes in terms of ensuring the very significant investment in scarce capacity and resources by each of the councils is targeted to have the greatest benefit for the Communities that both Councils serve. This reflects the need identified by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and agreed by all Members of making the most efficient use of officer and member time at Committees by focusing on the most sensitive / complex applications. Based upon the review undertaken, no changes are proposed to the approved scheme of delegation at

this time. The report also notes the potential introduction of regulations to mandate a national scheme of delegation on all Councils later this year.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Cambridge City Council Planning Committee/ South Cambridgeshire District Council Planning Committee / Joint Development Management Committee notes the contents of this report and that the Committee

- a) confirm that no changes are made to the scheme of delegation dated 22 May 2025; and
- b) notes the potential for regulations (and accompanying guidance implementing the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025) to mandate a national scheme of delegation for planning decisions.

3.0 Introduction and background

3.1 Currently the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSP) supports three Planning Committees - Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Joint Development Management planning committees.

3.2 In 2020, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) carried out reviews of all three committees, as part of a commitment by the Councils and Shared Planning Service to improving the effectiveness and consistency of approaches to planning and embodying where possible best practice to support improved community participation and effective and transparent decision making. The purpose of the committee process review was to review those recommendations made as part of the PAS reviews and develop an action plan.

3.3 Since 2020, work has been undertaken to revisit the review and aligning the recommendations made by PAS into the review of the Planning Committee process. The recommendations included identifying inconsistencies between committee meetings and opportunities to improve transparency, improving the experience for all “users” of the Planning Committee process for decision

making on planning and related applications and improving Compliance against statutory and service performance indicators (KPIs).

3.4 The scope of the committee review project included engaging with members of all planning committees to review their experiences and seek their insight into the future roles of the planning committee members, committee processes and to consider what makes a successful committee meeting. An officer working group and separate member working group were set up and worked together to inform the committee review to align the 3 planning committees.

4.0 Reasons for change to the scheme of delegation

4.1 The reasons for changing the scheme of delegation are in line with the 2020 PAS recommendation to make the most efficient use of officer and member time at Committees by focusing on the most sensitive / complex applications; and to ensure that there is consistency between the three planning committees to aid understanding by users and support transparency and efficiency of decision making. Over 90% of decisions at that time were delegated to Officers (from 1/1/24 to 1/11/24). Whilst this was broadly in line with the national average according to PAS, there are wide variances across the Country, and it is worthy of note that some councils delegate 95% of their applications to officers.

4.2 By way of background, in 2024 151 applications were heard between the three planning committees, equating to over 156 hours (equivalent to nearly 4 and a half weeks) of Member and officers time spent in the committees, in a total of 37 meetings. This time can be multiplied by all of those attending and servicing planning committee including its members, planning and legal officers, democratic services and internal specialists. Additionally, significant officer and member preparation and administrative time is also spent (for example sending out letters, organising rooms and equipment), report checking and writing, site visits, briefings and update sheets, all prior to the meeting. Post committee time is also spent writing and checking minutes and providing advice and information after committees to Councillors, staff, applicants, agents and members of the public.

Summary of approved changes to the scheme of delegation July 2024

4.3 The terms and definitions have been updated and aligned within the scheme of delegation.

4.4 Triggers have also been aligned for planning committee determination as follows:

- If there is a request from a Ward Member (or in the case of SCDC area a Parish Council) within the 21 days consultation, or 14 days if an amendment, for the planning application to be reviewed by a Delegation Panel to determine if a planning committee decision is required.
- Where there are 5 or more Third-party Representations on material planning grounds (that cannot be resolved by way of a condition) within the 21 days consultation, or 14 days if an amendment, for the planning application to be reviewed by a Delegation Panel to determine if a planning committee decision is required.
- Where there are 5 or more Third-party Representations on material grounds to a Tree Preservation Order application which are contrary to the Officer recommendation and which cannot be resolved by way of a condition, made within the 21 days consultation, or 14 days if an amendment, for the application to be considered by Planning Committee.
- If the application is a significant departure from the Local Plan and it is recommended for approval.
- If the applicant is an elected Member or an Officer of the relevant Council, or close relative or family member of either of such persons or where an Application is made on their behalf.
- The application is for the substantial demolition of a Listed Building or Building of Local Interest.
- Regulation 3 application (application made by the Local Authority)
- If, in the opinion of Officers, it should be determined by the Planning Committee, subject to special planning policy considerations or the complexity of the application or it is of significant and / or of strategic importance.

4.5 The Scheme of Delegation for the Joint Development Control Committee was also reviewed and amended, including being updated with a new name, the Joint Development Management Committee (JDMC). Triggers for JDMC planning committee determination are as follows:

- If the application is for one hundred (100) or more residential units, or 1,000m² or more non-residential development on a site that is one hectare or more.
- The application includes primary roads, open space, or strategic infrastructure.
- Regulation 3 applications by the Local Authority
- If the application is a significant departure from the Local Plan and it is recommended for approval.
- If the applicant is an elected Member or an Officer of the relevant Council, or close relative or family member of either of such persons or where an Application is made on their behalf.
- If, in the opinion of Officers there are special planning policy considerations, complex, significant or of strategic importance.
- If there is a request from a Parish Council or Ward Member within the 21 days consultation, or 14 days if an amendment, for the planning application to be considered by a Delegation Panel to determine if a planning committee decision is required.
- Where there are 5 or more Third-party Representations on material planning grounds (that cannot be resolved by way of a condition) within the 21 days consultation, or 14 days if an amendment, for the planning application to be reviewed by a Delegation Panel to determine if a planning committee decision is required.

In order to make the most efficient use of officer and member time at Committees by focusing on the most sensitive / complex applications Schedule A within the agreed scheme of delegation lists those application types which are delegated to the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development and not subject to a call-in process into Planning Committee, subject to a provision

which allows officers to refer any application to Committee in specific circumstances.

5.0 Revised Scheme of Delegation outcomes

Applications determined at Committee

2024			
	City	SCDC	JDMC
Number of apps at cttee	87	38	18
Time spent in cttee on apps	77.8 hrs	45.5hrs	34hrs
Average time per app	53 mins	50 mins	113 mins

June 25 - May 26			
	City	SCDC	JDMC
Number of apps at cttee	47	34	10
Time spent in cttee on apps	57.3hrs	34.5hrs	17.8hrs
Average time per app	73mins	61 mins	107 mins

- 5.1 Analysis of committee activity across 2024 and the period June 2025 to May 2026 shows a clear shift in both workload and how committee time is being used.
- 5.2 Overall, the number of applications presented to committee has reduced across all three committees. This reduction is most pronounced at City, where applications have fallen from 87 to 47 (a decrease of approximately 46%), and at JDMC, which has seen a reduction from 18 to 10 applications. SCDC has experienced a more modest decline, from 38 to 34 applications. As a result, total time spent in committee has also decreased across all committees, broadly in line with the reduction in volume of business.
- 5.3 Despite this reduction in overall workload, the average time spent by the Committee considering each per application has increased in most cases. At City, the average time per application has risen significantly from 53 minutes to 73 minutes (an increase of around 38%). SCDC shows a similar trend, increasing from 50 minutes to 1 hour 1 minute. In contrast, JDMC remains the

most time-intensive committee per application, although it has seen a slight reduction in average time spent, reducing from 1 hour 53 minutes to 1 hour 47 minutes per item.

5.4 This indicates that while committees are dealing with fewer applications overall, they are spending longer considering each one. The reduction in total meeting time is therefore attributable to lower volumes rather than improving efficiency. The increase in time per application at City and SCDC is likely to reflect a shift toward more complex or contentious applications being brought to committee, rather than a less efficient meeting processes. JDMC, while still requiring the longest discussion time per case, appears relatively stable in its approach and has achieved an improvement in efficiency, partly due to improvements also made to the way business is conducted.

5.5 In summary, the data clearly shows a transition toward fewer but longer discussions across committees. This may warrant further consideration of meeting structure, case selection, and decision-making processes to ensure committee time is being used as effectively as possible.

5.6 In conclusion, the committee process still represents a very significant investment in scarce capacity and resources by each of the Councils and it is therefore critical, given the opportunity cost of that time, that this investment remains targeted to have the greatest benefit for the Communities that both Councils serve. This reflects the need identified by PAS and agreed by Members of making the most efficient use of officer and member time at Committees by focusing on the most sensitive / complex applications.

Applications referred to Delegation Panel

Delegation Panel	Jan to Dec 2024	June 25 to May 26	Referred to committee
SCDC	41*	52	19
City	0	43	27
JDMC	0	2	1

* 12 referred to committee

- 5.7 Further analysis of Delegation Panel activity highlights a significant shift in how applications are managed prior to committee consideration, detailed analysis of reasons for referral to delegation panel can be found in appendix 1.
- 5.8 Since the 2024 analysis, SCDC has increased its use of the panel, rising from 41 to 52 cases; the introduction of the delegation panel at City has seen significant use with 43 applications being referred; while JDMC has introduced the process on a limited basis. This indicates the establishment of a more structured pre-committee review stage across the authorities.
- 5.9 The data also demonstrates that the Delegation Panel is now playing an important and effective role in the decision making process and allowing members to focus their time exploring the most complex cases before each Council. . At SCDC, 19 of the 52 applications considered by the panel have been referred on to committee, meaning the majority are being resolved without escalation. This suggests a relatively effective use of the panel to manage and reduce committee caseload. At City, 27 of the 43 applications reviewed have proceeded to committee, representing a higher referral rate. This may indicate differences in either the complexity of cases being considered or relative newness of the panel and bedding in of confidence with the thresholds applied when determining whether an application should be escalated.
- 5.10 When considered alongside the committee time data, a clear pattern emerges. While overall numbers of applications reaching committee have reduced, those that do proceed are taking longer to discuss and determine. The increased use of the Delegation Panel is therefore likely contributing to a shift whereby more routine or less contentious applications are resolved earlier in the process, leaving committee to focus on more complex, sensitive, or disputed cases.
- 5.11 In this context, the Delegation Panel appears to be supporting a more targeted use of committee time. However, the increase in average time per application suggests that the benefits of reduced volume are being partially offset by the

increase in length of time spent on the more complex cases reaching committee and/or the way in which meetings are being conducted. This reinforces the importance of ensuring that committee processes remain efficient and proportionate, particularly as the nature of applications evolves.

- 5.12 Overall, the evidence suggests that the introduction and expansion of the Delegation Panel has enabled Committees to focus their time on larger and more complex applications. The consistent application of the delegation panel process has also improved consistency and transparency of the GCSP processes and represents a positive development in managing workflow and prioritising committee resources. However, there may be opportunities to further refine its role to maximise consistency and effectiveness across all committees.

6.0 National Scheme of Delegation

- 6.1 It is worthy of noting that the Government consulted in April 2026 on draft Regulations and guidance underpinning the government's planning committee reforms from the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.
- 6.2 The draft Regulations and accompanying guidance implementing the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 ([Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: Draft guidance for Local Planning Authorities in England - GOV.UK](#)) set out a shift to a more standardised, officer-led decision-making model for local planning authorities in England, centred on a mandatory national scheme of delegation, tighter controls on committee size and composition, and compulsory training for committee members. Under the proposals, most routine and policy-compliant applications (defined in a "Tier A"/Schedule 1 list) must be determined by planning officers, while only more significant proposals (Tier B/Schedule 2) can reach committee subject to a statutory "gateway test" agreed by senior officers and a nominated councillor, effectively removing general member call-in powers and making committee involvement exceptional. A copy of these proposed two tiers is included at appendix 2.

- 6.3 The guidance emphasises an expectation that committees should focus on strategic or contentious cases, improving consistency, speed and certainty across authorities, while regulations also enable the Secretary of State to cap committee sizes (around a proposed maximum) and require certified training to improve decision quality and professionalism.
- 6.4 Overall, the reforms aim to reduce delays and variation by standardising governance and increasing delegation, while retaining a narrower but more targeted role for democratically elected members in major or locally significant planning decisions.
- 6.5 The response to the consultation from GCSPS can be found here [[Reform of planning committees technical consultation.pdf](#)] and was based on the previously approved response by members of all 3 planning committees in July 2025 to the proposed reforms, acknowledging the work the officer and member working group undertook to review and implement the single scheme of delegation but noting, as we did previously, that, listening to our local communities it is important to recognise there are occasionally exceptional circumstances for controversial applications (within the schedule 1 list) at a local level to be referred to committees for a decision.

7.0 Implications

Financial Implications

- 7.1 The cost of the Planning Committee meetings, reflecting the amount of Member time, but also the significant officer input to prepare, attend and administer a meeting are significant. The Councils existing staff and resources budgets cover these costs. The changes have not increased the frequency of Planning Committee meetings but reduced caseload of items at the committee meetings and made the investment of time and resources more effective. The changes to the scheme of delegation did not introduce additional costs but indirectly supported ongoing work to increase impact and effectiveness the Councils and the Shared Planning Service.

Staffing Implications

7.2 There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

Equality and Poverty Implications

7.3 An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has not been undertaken in respect of this report, because no material changes are proposed to the fundamental operation of the Committee meetings.

Environmental Implications

7.4 None.

Procurement Implications

7.5 None.

Community Safety Implications

7.6 None.

Legal Implications

7.7 None

8.0 Consultation and Communication Considerations

8.1 No formal consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this report.

9.0 Background Papers

9.1 Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- PAS report 2020 – Planning Committee Peer Review, Cambridge City Council
- PAS report 2021 – Planning Committee Peer Review, South Cambridgeshire District Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council Ethical Handbook (May 2020) Ethical Handbook.pdf (modern.gov.co.uk) and Constitution. Agenda for Constitution on Thursday, 9 June 2022 (modern.gov.co.uk)
- Cambridge City Council Planning Code of Good Practice 2015

- PAS Planning Committee Protocols: [Planning Committee Protocols | Local Government Association](#)
- Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service Scheme of Delegation for Planning Committee
- Planning Committee Review Report to Planning Committees, August 2024
- Planning Committee Review, Scheme of Delegation Report to Planning Committees, January 2025
- Constitutional Changes to South Cambridgeshire District Council in regards of Planning Report, May 2025
- Cambridge City Council Constitution Report, May 2025
- South Cambridgeshire District Council's Constitution
- Cambridge City Council Constitution

10.0 Report Author

Rebecca Smith

Delivery Manager

Rebecca.smith@greatercambridgeplanning.org

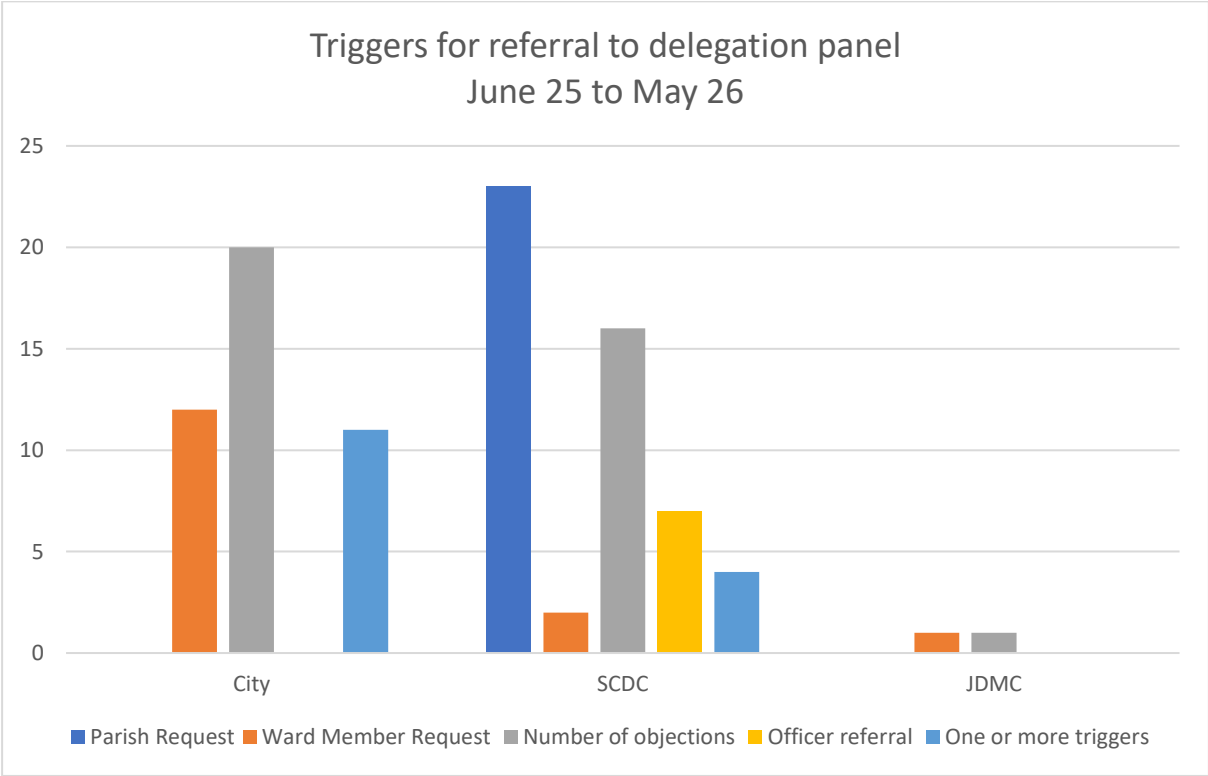
11.0 Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Applications referred to delegation panel

Appendix 2 – National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions, Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 applications

Appendix 1 – Triggers for referral to delegation panel

	City	SCDC	JDMC
Parish Request	0	23	0
Ward Member Request	12	2	1
Number of objections	20	16	1
Officer referral	0	7	0
One or more triggers	11	4	0



Appendix 2 - National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions

Schedule 1

Schedule 1 of the Regulations sets out all the functions which must be delegated to officers in all cases. These include a number of categories of applications for planning permission for:

- householder development (as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015)
- minor commercial development (as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015)
- minor residential development (consisting of up to 9 new dwellings (flats or houses) on a site smaller than 0.5 hectares and other minor development in relation to flats)

It also contains a range of other planning consents:

- where it is not related to a phase of development in an outline planning permission, reserved matters approvals (applications under Article 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015)
- discharge of conditions (applications under Article 27(1) of Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015)
- prior approval for permitted development rights (applications under Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015)
- permission in principle (as referred to in section 58A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- where a local planning authority considers a planning obligation is connected to a Schedule 1 application, requests to agree to modify or discharge a planning obligation (under section 106A(1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- where local planning authority considers a planning obligation is connected to a Schedule 1 application, modification or discharge of a planning obligation

(applications under section 106A(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)

- non-material changes to planning permission or permission in principle (applications under section 96A(4) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- certificates of lawfulness of existing use or development (under section 191(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- certificates of lawfulness of proposed use or development (under section 192(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- biodiversity gain plan (duty to approve under paragraph 14 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- certificates of appropriate alternative development (applications under section 17 of the Land Compensation Act 1961)

However, the application will fall within Schedule 2 where:

- a local authority considers that a Schedule 1 application for planning permission is connected to a Schedule 2 application for listed building consent or for the variation or discharge of a condition on a listed building consent
- an application would otherwise fall under Schedule 1 but is made under section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990
- an application would otherwise fall under Schedule 1 but is made by or on behalf of a local authority, a member or officer of that local authority or an entity owned or controlled (whether wholly or partly) by that authority or any of its members or officers

Schedule 2

The functions which fall within Schedule 2 of the Regulations are:

- applications for planning permission not listed in Schedule 1
- applications to develop land without compliance with conditions previously attached (under section 73(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- applications for development which has already been carried out (under section 73A(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- where it is related to a phase of development in an outline planning permission, applications for reserved matters approvals (under Article 6 of the

Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure)
(England) Order 2015)

- where a local planning authority considers a planning obligation is connected to a Schedule 2 application, requests to agree to modify or discharge a planning obligation (under section 106A(1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- where a local planning authority considers a planning obligation is connected to a Schedule 2 application, application for modification or discharge of a planning obligation (under section 106A(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990)
- applications for listed building consent (under section 10 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990)
- applications for the variation or discharge of conditions of listed building consent (under section 19 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990)
- applications for advertisement consent (under regulation 9 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007)
- applications for consent under tree preservation orders (under regulation 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012)
- applications to which paragraph 11 above apply