



Committee and Date Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee	Item 3
10 April 2014	
10.00 am	Public

MINUTES OF THE ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 10.00AM ON 31 OCTOBER 2013

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Present

Committee:

Councillors A Bannerman, C Barnes, M Bennett [substitute for J Everall], J Cadwallader [substitute for N Bardsley], D Carroll, S Davenport (Chairman), P Dee (Vice Chairman), J Hurst-Knight and Dr J Jones.

Also in attendance:

Councillors M Price, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Planning, Housing and Commissioning [central] and D Lloyd, Vice Chairman of the Rapid Action Task and Finish Group on Planning.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Bardsley [substitute: J Cadwallader] and J Everall [substitute: M Bennett].

2. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Members were reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from Members.

6. REPORT OF THE RAPID ACTION TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON PLANNING

The Committee Chairman thanked all Members and Officers involved in the work of the Rapid Action Task and Finish Group on Planning that had worked quickly and efficiently to formulate its recommendations. He commended the new style of working that had comprised rapidly scheduled meetings, liaison with representatives from Herefordshire Council and attendance at a Planning Committee, the compilation of an on line questionnaire for all members of the Council and a series of individual Member interviews by members of the Task and Finish Group.

In re-iterating the thanks extended to those involved in the work of the Task and Finish Group, the Portfolio Holder stated that he was pleased that the Group had reached a consensus view and had been able to put forward its recommendations on that basis. Given the reduction in resources within the Planning service, he stressed the need for new ways of working to be developed and believed the Group's recommendations, if agreed, would go some way towards this. Despite some Members' misgivings about the level of resource he stated that the service could be maintained but it would be delivered in different ways. Members noted that recommendations agreed by the Group would be reviewed in six months' time to ascertain their success and impact.

The Committee considered each of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations in turn.

Recommendation (i)

In response to a Member's concerns, the Portfolio Holder agreed the need for improved Member/Officer liaison at every stage of the progress of applications in their area. He commented that Herefordshire Council operated a clear process all the way through an application's progress that resulted in excellent two way communication between the appropriate Member/s and Officer/s.

Responding to further concern on the impact of the Council's Voluntary Redundancy scheme on certain parts of the county, the Portfolio Holder assured Members that sufficient resource was available to provide the service.

The Principal Planning Officer added that a better mechanism was needed to trigger referral of applications to committee and, should the Task and Finish

Group recommendations be supported, it was likely that 4 or 5 applications would be presented to future planning committee meetings.

Another Member commented on the need to ensure that Parish and Town Councils understood planning legislation sufficiently in order to avoid unnecessary attempts to refer matter to Committee. The Task and Finish Group's recommendation to this effect was noted together with the suggested compilation of an FAQ sheet that may assist further.

Recommendation (ii)

The production of lean, concise, non repetitive Committee reports was largely supported although some Members were concerned that the reports should contain sufficient information together with sound reasoning for recommendations made in the report in order to assist those attending the meeting. The Principal Planning Officer commented that Town and Parish Councils would be encouraged to attend meetings in future and to report back on the flavour of the debate to their own Councils.

Recommendation (iii)

A Member voiced her disappointment with the Task and Finish Group's recommendation for the retention of the three Planning Committees 'for the time being'. The Committee Chairman stressed that if the 96% delegation rate could not be achieved a review of the process would be necessary. The Portfolio Holder added that if the evidence showed that the delegation rate was not being achieved then he would ensure that a review of the process was undertaken in six months' time.

Recommendation (iv)

The Principal Planning Officer commented that the holding of all three Planning Committees centrally would help in the provision of planning officer support to the committees. However, a Member stated that this would serve to disadvantage those living in large swathes of the county, for whom the logistics of holding meetings in Shrewsbury and out of the local areas would render attendance difficult if not impossible. Other Members did not have the same concerns and considered the focal point of Shrewsbury to be advantageous for the majority.

Responding to Members' queries about site visits, the Principal Planning Officer stated that he anticipated site visits would be held in the morning of any given planning committee meeting with Members meeting in Shrewsbury, travelling together to the site visits and returning to Shrewsbury for the planning committee meeting that same afternoon.

The Portfolio Holder suggested that the move of all three Planning Committees to one central location would facilitate the consistent and robust development of all three Planning Committees.

Recommendation (v)

The Committee agreed that any decision to hold a special meeting of any of the planning committees in the local area should be made in consultation with the local Member/s, the Committee Chairman and appropriate Officer/s.

Recommendation (vi)

It was noted that this recommendation did not usurp disclosable pecuniary interests but did overcome the issue of 'bias'. The Portfolio Holder commented that the recommended process would make it easier for Members to comment freely on applications from their own area and to provide advice to their local Parish/Town Councils on local planning matters.

RECOMMENDED:

- i) That every effort be made to increase the delegation rate to over 96%:

To achieve this:

- Refine the Member trigger referral so that there is more challenge from the Lead Officer and Committee Chairs, rather than simply letting inappropriate applications come through to Committee.
- Members be provided with support in respect of requests to refer to Committee so that they clearly understand the planning issues and whether these can be addressed by means of conditions or negotiation.
- Local Members should strongly advise Parish and Town Councils that their support to refer to Committee is dependent on the Parish then also speaking at the Committee meeting, wherever possible.
- Establishing a strong expectation that Local Members will attend and address a Committee if they have referred an item
- A mechanism be set up to allow Parish and Town Councils to access decision reports so they can understand the reasons decisions have been made (possibly through an FAQ sheet)
- Following Planning Committee meetings, Committee Chairs and Officers reflect and collate information on what might have been delegated, so as to further refine the process

- ii) That Delegated decision reports and Committee reports be shortened and simplified, whilst still meeting Legal requirements.

- iii) That for the time being three Committees meeting monthly are retained, acknowledging that if the delegation rate is not increased to the required 96 % this cannot be sustained, and will require further urgent review in 6 months' time or on the request of the Portfolio Holder.
- iv) That the three Committees all meet centrally in Shrewsbury in order to minimise meeting costs to the authority [e.g. venue hire, lunches] and to provide sufficient operational assistance to the Council's customers – the applicants, developers and their agents.
- v) That, in consultation with the local Member/s, the Committee Chairman and appropriate Officer/s, consideration be given to the benefits of holding a special meeting in the appropriate local area when an application of major local importance is to be determined.
- vi) That Planning Committee members do not vote or take part in the Committee debate when applications from their own Ward are considered [The Member to physically move away from the Committee 'table' but stay in the room]. This will allow Members to speak freely on applications from their own area and to provide advice to their local Parish/Town Councils on these matters.

The meeting closed at 11.10am

Chairman:

Date: ...10 April 2014