

Final Report of the Planning Committee System Task Group:

Update following discussions with the Cabinet Member

Purpose

1. To present the outcomes of discussions between the Planning Committee System Task Group and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Asset Management regarding the Task Group's final report, which was debated by Committee on 20 March 2018.

Background

2. OS Management Committee established a Planning Committee System Task Group in June 2017 and the Task Group's final report (attached at Appendix 1) was received on 20 March 2018. Following debate (minute attached at Appendix 2) the Committee did not endorse the report but resolved to ask the Task Group to meet with the Cabinet Member to discuss it and bring any further proposals to the next meeting.
3. The Task Group met with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Asset Management and the Head of Service for Development Management on 17 May 2018. Discussions covered the Cabinet Member's views on the Task Group's 12 recommendations and whether further scrutiny work on this topic would be of value.

Discussion of recommendations

4. The 12 recommendations from the Task Group's original report are included below. The Cabinet Member was invited to highlight any of the recommendations that he believed were incorrect or could be improved through amendment and the notes of these discussions are provided. In some cases the Task Group's recommendations have been amended.

- 1. To note the overall positive responses from planning applicants and planning professionals who had recently used the planning application service to a survey of their experiences.**

Not discussed.

- 2. To consider how the following improvements suggested within survey responses might be addressed, including, if appropriate, through the introduction of optional, charged-for services:**
- a) Further increasing the speed of the overall planning process**
 - b) Increasing the speed of the pre-application process**
 - c) Increasing the amount of application-specific advice provided to applicants during the pre-application process**
 - d) Enabling more direct discussions between planning officers and applicants, including on site.**

Not discussed.

- 3. To inform applicants of town/parish council's role in the planning process on the website and relevant correspondence.**

Not discussed.

- 4. To provide further information on plans to upgrade the digital technology used by the Planning team in order to support making the planning application service as effective as possible.**

Not discussed.

- 5. To note that reducing the council's area planning committee structure from 4 to 3 by dissolving Eastern Area Planning Committee would generate an approximate annual saving of £10,000.**

Not discussed.

- 6. That no reduction to the council's area planning committee structure should be made without sound evidence regarding,**
- a) the benefits of doing so, and**
 - b) the impact on local democracy and accountability (including the public's ability to attend planning committee meetings without incurring additional cost or inconvenience).**

Discussion:

The Cabinet Member suggested that any further scrutiny work on this matter would not be appropriate until the outcomes of the Electoral Commission's Boundary Review are known.

The Task Group agrees. It further concludes that, even if the total number of Wiltshire Councillors is reduced following the Boundary Review, it would not justify a reduction in the number of area planning committees for the reasons outlined under paragraphs 57 to 62 of its report (although the number of councillors on each committee might reduce).

The Task Group's report concludes that reducing the current area planning committee structure from four to three would save £11,774. If such savings

were considered necessary, the Task Group would recommend they be achieved instead by reducing the number of area planning committee chairmen from four to two (chairing two committees each), yielding a reduced spend on councillors' Special Responsibility Allowances of £XXXX.

7. To retain the Strategic Planning Committee within the planning committee structure.

Not discussed.

8. To note the overall positive response from planning applicants and planning professionals to survey of their experiences of the planning committee process.

Not discussed.

9. To require councillors calling applications in for committee decision to provide a reason for doing so, to be presented at the relevant committee meeting by the councillor or on their behalf. ~~When these reasons are not provided prior to the committee agenda being published, discussion of the relevant application to be deferred until the following meeting.~~

Discussion:

The Cabinet Member and the Task Group agreed that the original wording of Recommendation 9 would cause delays in the planning application process that were unfair to applicants. The Task Group therefore amends the wording of this recommendation, with the second sentence being removed as indicated above.

It was further noted that the recommended amendment to the call-in procedure would need to be reflected in the relevant councillor guidance note, if accepted.

10. The Cabinet Member and Planning Committee Chairmen to

a) agree and implement a consistent approach to managing public participation at planning committee meetings

Discussion:

The Cabinet Member noted that a consistent approach is already set out within the Planning Committee Procedure note, but it is not necessarily followed consistently.

b) adopt the Southern Area Planning Committee's approach to agreeing site visits*, with the committee chairman taking the final decision on what is a valid councillor request for a site visit when the request is made outside of a committee meeting.

* As outlined in the Task Group's report, Southern Area Planning Committee sometimes takes the decision to hold a site visit before the application has appeared on an agenda or the committee has met.

Discussion:

The Cabinet Member and Task Group agreed that it was planning committee members' duty to be familiar with the sites to be discussed.

The Task Group clarified that the recommended change is not intended to increase the number of site visits undertaken. It also does not remove the ability of planning committees to agree site visits when an application is being discussed. The recommended change is only intended to **add** the ability to agree site visits **before** discussion at committee and, in doing so, increase the speed and efficiency of the planning process.

To further clarify the process being recommended, the Task Group has added the wording underlined above.

11. In order to protect public confidence in the openness and transparency of the council's decision making processes, pre-meeting briefings for full planning committee memberships to cease.

Discussion:

The Cabinet Member stated that such pre-meeting briefings can play a valuable role in updating planning committee members on changes to planning policy and law.

The Task Group agrees that periodic training and briefings for planning committee members (that should be accessible online and via Skype) would be of benefit, and should be investigated. However, the Task Group does not agree that this should be delivered through pre-planning committee meeting briefings for the reasons outlined in paragraph 68 of its report.

The Task Group also agrees that a central online location for planning training materials would be of benefit.

12. That the process for determining Rights of Way and Village Green applications is reviewed and potential improvements reported to Committee.

Not discussed.

13. In order to ensure a consistent approach to determining planning applications across the county, to undertake further analysis of

statistical variances in the four area planning committees' practices regarding,

- a) Calling planning applications in for decision by committee**
- b) Deciding against planning officers' recommendations (including any correlation with subsequent planning appeal outcomes).**

Not discussed.

Proposal

5. That OS Management Committee:

- a) Notes the discussions held between the Task Group and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Property on 17 May 2018.
- b) With the exception of Recommendations 9 and 10(b), endorses the original recommendations presented in the Task Group's Final Report (attached at Appendix 1) and refers them to the Cabinet Member where appropriate.
- c) Endorses Recommendations 9 and 10 b) as amended in the update report above and refers them to the Cabinet Member.
- d) Endorses a further recommendation that periodic training and briefings for planning committee members (accessible online and via Skype) be investigated, and refers this to the Cabinet Member.
- e) Resolves that the Planning Committee System Task Group has now concluded its work.

Cllr Ian McLennan, Chairman of Planning Committee System Task Group

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Appendices

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| Appendix 1 | Final Report of the Planning Committee System Task Group, 20 March 2018s |
| Appendix 2 | Minute of OS Management Committee's discussion of the Task Group report, 20 March 2018 |