

**IMPLEMENTATION EXECUTIVE 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPT 2008**

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**Developing the Development Control Service**

**Report by Brad Fleet**

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**Purpose of report**

1. The Joint Overview & Scrutiny Transition Board (JOSTB) made recommendations to the Implementation Executive (IE) at its meeting in July concerning the findings of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Development Control. The IE supported the thrust of the recommendations made by the JOSTB but asked for further information concerning the details of how they would work. The report which follows provides the additional information. The IE suggested that the JOSTB or the Task Group may also like to consider the report. The report was therefore discussed at a meeting of the Development Control Task Group held on the 10<sup>th</sup> September. The views of the task group have been incorporated into the text. A separate report by the task group highlighting the issues raised and dealt with is included under this item. The task group supports the revised text and there are no longer any substantive differences of view to highlight to the IE.

**Executive Summary**

2. This report provides information on the make up of the strategic and four area planning committees and explains that only the former has to be politically balanced.
3. It describes the nature of the work each committee will undertake and the types of applications they will consider. It also contains a proposed 'scheme of delegation to officers' aimed at ensuring the new authority has the capacity to deal with the expected 9 to 10,000 planning applications per year.
4. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2009 and the election of the new council there will have to be a mechanism in place for members to determine some planning applications and the report proposes that selected members of the IE form an interim planning committee to do this.
5. Mention is made in the report of the need to adequately resource the enforcement service if it is to deliver the proactive service members have indicated they want.
6. The report and Appendix 3 address in detail the subject of parish or town councils 'call-ins' and conclude that if the parish council call-in system is to be adopted, it is difficult to see how the performance of the area hub office at Trowbridge can be significantly improved, whilst the number of applications considered by committee at the other area offices will significantly increase.

This will increase the Council's costs and lead to a reduced performance and efficiency.

7. Details are provided towards the end of the report on the need for more work to be undertaken to establishing design panels similar to the one currently operating in Salisbury and it explains the work officers will carry out to ensure that adequate training is provided for members who will sit on planning committees and for any other member who has an interest in planning matters.
8. Finally, the report concludes with seven recommendations for the IE to endorse:-
  - a) Members of the area planning committees should be selected from the councillors elected in the relevant area, with all members having speaking rights on applications in their division
  - b) The roles and responsibilities of the Strategic and Area Planning Committees be split in accordance with the proposals in the report
  - c) There be no mechanism for referrals from the Area Committees to the Strategic Planning Committee
  - d) A Scheme of Delegation to officers is adopted for decisions on planning applications, which, if approved, will mean that only division members can ask for applications to proceed to determination by way of committee
  - e) Decisions on non-delegated applications between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 and the election of the new council are made by a committee made up of selected members of the IE
  - f) A revised county-wide Statement of Community Involvement be prepared setting out how the council will deal with pre-application discussions and community involvement on planning applications
  - g) Officers carry out further work to explore opportunities to establish additional design panels after April 2009

### **Governance arrangements and Scheme of Delegation**

9. The IE accepted the principle that the Development Control Service should be delivered on a local basis, with area offices in Trowbridge, Devizes, Chippenham and Salisbury. It agreed that each of these offices would support an area planning committee. A strategic committee would consider issues of countywide interest in both development control and forward planning. The current development control staff based in County Hall will join their West Wiltshire District Council colleagues in a single location in the town from where they will continue to provide a countywide service in respect of certain specialised applications, i.e. minerals, waste and probably some large scale educational developments. The members of the IE requested further information on the make-up of the membership of the area committees and on the split of responsibilities between the area and strategic committees.

## **Membership of area planning committees**

10. It is important to ensure that every member of the new council has the opportunity to speak on planning applications that are being considered within their division. However, it is not essential for every councillor to be a member of the area planning committee to be able to do this. Councillors will have a wider range of responsibilities than either current district or county members and some members (who have not previously been county members) will also have a larger geographic area and population to respond to. Furthermore, not every member will have an interest in deciding planning applications. In these circumstances, it is considered that each area planning committee should be made up of a selection of members elected in that area, with the remaining members in that area entitled to attend and speak on applications within their division. Voting would be by committee members only.
11. Legal advice is that the requirements for political balance will not apply to area planning committees if the committee is established solely to advise or discharge functions of the council in respect of part of the area of the council and all voting members have been elected for divisions which are wholly or partly within that area. This is on the basis that that area or part does not exceed 2/5 of the total area of the council or the population of that part exceed 2/5 of the total population of the council's area. Having said this, there is no restriction on members deciding to have politically balanced area committees should they wish.
12. On this basis the four proposed area planning committees will not have to be politically balanced; appointment of committee members can be by the Council following a process of selection of members from the relevant area.
13. As the strategic committee **will** have a county wide remit, its membership will have to be determined on a politically proportionate basis and it will be for the Council to appoint members to this committee at the first meeting of the new council.

## **Split of responsibilities between Area and Strategic Planning Committees**

14. The central factor in systems (or lean) thinking in relation to planning decisions is that the new council should make the right decision at the right time in the right place. The right decision relates to the planning merits of the case; the right time requires decisions to be expedited and not unnecessarily delayed; the right place applies to the level the decision is taken at.
15. Applying these principles, the Strategic Planning Committee is the body that would deal with strategic planning decisions. The Committee would have a wider brief than planning applications, dealing with reports concerning the Local Development Framework and the implications of major developments outside of Wiltshire that could have an impact on local residents. (This committee will be a decision making body as the law requires that functions relating to the Local Development Framework must not be the sole

responsibility of Cabinet) With regard to planning applications, it would deal directly with:

- Large-scale major developments (defined by CLG as those of 200 houses or more or 10,000 square metres of non-residential floor space) which, by their nature (e.g. scale, location etc.) have wider strategic implications and raise issues of more than local importance;
- Planning applications for mineral extraction or waste disposal, other than small scale works which are ancillary to an existing mineral working or waste disposal facility.
- Applications, which if approved, would represent a significant departure from the policies of the statutory development plan, where they are recommended for approval (*this could be an application where policy considerations would normally dictate a recommendation of refusal but where there are other material considerations at work, such as substantial community benefits in the form of a new/replacement school which could tip the balance in favour of a positive recommendation*);
- Applications called in by a Division Member that cross the boundary of two area committees (*a classic example being a single application for a golf course occupying a large area where it would clearly be impractical to take the application to two adjoining area committees*)

16. The Area Committees would also have a wider brief than planning applications and would consider planning matters of local importance within the area, such as the designation of conservation areas; the consideration of village design statements and parish plans where council approval is required for them to be considered as material considerations in dealing with planning applications. They would deal with planning applications called to the committee by Division Members with the exception of those that will go directly to the Strategic Planning Committee, as set out above. Members should note, however, that there will be occasions when, having considered the public representations and consultee responses the Director of Development considers it inappropriate to exercise delegated powers and in such cases these applications will proceed to determination by an appropriate planning committee.
17. To avoid the potential confusion of applications being heard twice, and to give ownership of the decision making powers to the right level, there would be no referral of applications from Area Planning Committees to the Strategic Planning Committee. This would enable applicants to know from the outset which committee will be responsible for determining their application and will avoid members of the public having to attend more than one meeting. (This proposal is a departure from the original recommendation of the JOSTB which indicated that there should be a referral mechanism)
18. Timeliness is a key element in dealing with planning applications. Government targets on the period allowed for dealing with planning applications are likely to increase by 2011 towards 80% of all applications being dealt with within 13 weeks (majors/large scale majors) and 8 weeks (all other applications). It is therefore envisaged that Area Planning Committees will initially meet every three weeks. The Strategic Planning Committee would meet on a four week cycle. (Meeting dates will be programmed but may not take place if there is no

business and the timing of meetings may need to be revised in the light of workload and performance).

### **Scheme of Delegation**

19. Members of both the JOSTB and the IE have accepted the principle that call-in of a planning application to an area planning committee should normally be by the Division Member. Concern has been expressed about procedure when the Division Member is absent. To cover these circumstances, it is proposed that the call-in powers be exercised either by the Division Member, or in their absence, by any other Wiltshire Councillor nominated by them.
20. It is essential that Division Members are kept well informed of proposed developments in their area. It is proposed that members would receive a 'weekly list' via e-mail detailing all the planning applications received in the area covered by their local office. The list would provide full details of the application, including the name of the case officer handling it. Members would be able to call to Area Planning Committee a planning application that fell within the scheme of delegation, as long as the request was made in writing/e-mail citing relevant and material planning considerations within three weeks of the application appearing on a weekly list. Officers will provide a paper and electronic 'pro-forma' to assist with this process. (It would be exceptional for any application to be 'called in' if the officer's recommendation was in accord with the local member's views)
21. Members have also accepted the principle of aiming for a high level of delegation of approximately 95%. This is essential if the 9-10,000 planning applications received by the new council are to be dealt with in a timely manner. It is also best practice to ensure that the time of area planning committees is spent on dealing with the important and controversial applications. The Scheme of Delegation set out in Appendix 1 below aims to achieve this. Members should note that there is no provision for third party representations to trigger an application being considered by committee.

### **Interim Arrangements between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and Wiltshire Council elections**

22. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, the existing district councils will no longer exist. In the interim period between 1<sup>st</sup> April and the elections for members of the new council, responsibility for determining planning applications rests with the Implementation Executive. It is recommended that eight members of the Implementation Executive be selected to form a temporary committee to deal with non delegated applications during this period, meeting on a three week cycle.
23. However, this new committee is unlikely to be able to handle the full workload of four area committees and strategic applications. In these circumstances, it is suggested that the Scheme of Delegation set out in Appendix 1 should apply, but with the added proviso that the powers of call-in should not apply to householder applications, listed building consents and conservation area consents. This limitation on call-in powers would apply during the transitional period only. The right to call an application to a committee during this period should rest with Implementation Executive Members.

24. An extract from the latest DCLG advice on the options for dealing with non-delegated applications in this transition period is set out in Appendix 2. In essence this states that applications can be determined by members of the Implementation Executive **or** by co-opting members of regulatory committees of predecessor councils onto a regulatory committee. The latter committee(s) must, however, reflect the political balance of the Implementation Executive.
25. Officers have queried this 'anomaly' twice with DCLG and on both occasions been informed that this 'balance' requirement is not open to negotiation. In the light of this, and the likely difficulties of arranging four area committees X 2 between Vesting Day and the elections officers believe that the simplest way forward is probably that set out in paras 12 and 13 above.

## **Enforcement**

26. Although the detailed structure of the Development Control Service will continue to evolve between now and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, it is currently envisaged that the enforcement service will be delivered locally from the area offices. However, to improve the service, it is likely that in each of the hubs, a Senior Officer will take dedicated responsibility for leading the enforcement officers. This will raise both the capacity and quality of the service and enable the Council to be more responsive to local concerns and will have to be adequately resourced. There will almost certainly also be a need for a dedicated officer to deal with specialist minerals and waste enforcement matters.

## **Involvement of Town and Parish Councils**

27. The thrust of current planning policy is to involve town and parish councils at the earliest stages of the process. This is line with the concept of a 'development management' culture that focuses on delivering the development that local residents and businesses want to see, as set out in community strategies and the local development framework. This implies that town and parish councils should be seeking to shape their towns and villages through involvement in developing the core strategy for the area, with detailed design issues addressed through other plans such as village design statements, parish plans, and conservation area statements. They should be involved in pre-application discussions on larger schemes, fostered through the Statement of Community Involvement. (A draft county wide Statement will be prepared with a provisional completion date in October 2009.) Once a planning application has been submitted, they should be able to view both the application itself and consultation responses on-line. The system across the County will allow for a 21-day formal consultation period for town and parish councils to set out their response. Call-in powers will remain with division members.
28. This is justified for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is important to recognise that the limited time available for applications to be considered at committee should be used to debate the significant and controversial applications in the county. It is a waste of resources and adds unnecessary delay if committee reports have to be written and committee time taken up with applications that division members have no objection to. Secondly, it is notable that many of the

best performing rural Councils, such as Broadland; Wyre Borough Council and Mid-Devon all successfully operate delegated schemes that are based on division member call-in. Finally, both national and local authority bodies, including the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Local Government Association and the Planning Advisory Service all support extensive schemes of delegation to maximise the time available to spend on applications that require greater scrutiny.

29. Members should note, however, that since the original JO&STG report was tabled, a number of parish and town councils have written or e-mailed to say they are unhappy with the proposals to restrict the ability to 'call-in' applications to division members. They consider this proposal to be "a retrograde step, diminishing the role of the local community in being able to influence decision making, at a time when the government is developing a greater role for local communities, which is also one of the cornerstones of Wiltshire's bid for unitary status." These authorities would therefore like the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board, and ultimately the Implementation Executive to reconsider this recommendation.
30. A separate briefing paper on the implications of continuing and extending parish and town council call in rights across the county has been attached as Appendix 3 to this report. The conclusion of officers is that the new unitary council needs to adopt the best practices used both nationally and already established within parts of the county if it is to be successful. If the parish-council call-in system were to be adopted, it is difficult to see how the performance of the area hub office at Trowbridge can be significantly improved, whilst the number of applications considered by committee at the other area offices would significantly increase. This would increase the Council's costs and lead to a reduced performance and efficiency. (Members must also bear in mind that all call-in by members will have a similar effect.)

### **Role of Local Design Panels**

31. Salisbury is currently the only council operating a local design forum/panel and it is acknowledged that this has done some very valuable work. This panel will continue. Officers propose carrying out further work to explore opportunities to establish additional forums/panels elsewhere in the county when the new development service is up and running in 2009.
32. It is also worth noting that one of the benefits of merging the district councils together to form one unitary authority is that the expertise of urban design officers in those councils that currently employ them will become more widely available throughout the county.

### **General**

33. The timing of area committee meetings was discussed briefly by the Implementation Executive when it was decided that it would be for the individual area committees to choose the time of day that meetings take place.
34. With regard to member 'planning' training, this is clearly an important area and between now and the 2009 elections officers will prepare a schedule of

seminars for members who will sit on the new area committees. (Any elected member will be welcome to attend these seminars) There will also be a specific training programme developed for those members who may be called upon to determine planning applications between 1<sup>st</sup> April and the elections. This latter training will have to take place prior to 1<sup>st</sup> April, probably in Feb/March 2009.

35. Finally, while it will be possible to amend the historic district boundaries to cater for the varying needs of the proposed Area Boards, this will cause serious problems for the Area Planning Committees in the medium term because the policies contained in the existing Local Plans are tied to district boundaries. Varying the catchment of an Area Planning Committee will therefore result in the committee and officers having to work with policies contained in two or more local plans. In the longer term, when a single county wide Local Development Framework is in place uniform policies will apply throughout the county and catchments could be varied.

### **Recommendations**

36. Having noted the report above, the IE is asked to approve and endorse the following recommendations: -
- a. Membership of the area planning committees to be selected from the Councillors elected in the relevant area, with all members having speaking rights on matters in their division (*paragraph 10*);
  - b. The roles and responsibilities of the Strategic and Area Planning Committees are split in accordance with the proposals in this report (*paragraphs 15-16*);
  - c. There is no mechanism for referrals from the Area Committees to the Strategic Planning Committee, thus ensuring that non-strategic decisions are made locally and to enable the public to know where the decision will be made. (Division members will, however, be able to call-in applications to the appropriate committee) (*paragraph 17*);
  - d. The Scheme of Delegation set out in Appendix 1 is adopted for decisions on planning applications made by the new Council; (If approved, this will mean that only division members can ask for applications to proceed to determination by way of committee)
  - e. The Interim Arrangements for decision making between April 1<sup>st</sup> and the election of the new Council and subsequent formation of the Strategic and Areas Planning Committees are adopted (*paragraphs 22-23*);
  - f. A revised county-wide Statement of Community Involvement be prepared to set out a consistent protocol for pre-application discussions and community involvement on planning applications (*paragraph 27*);
  - g. Officers carry out further work to explore opportunities to establish additional design panels, similar to the one operating in Salisbury, after April 2009. (*paragraph 31*).



## **Scheme of Delegation**

The Director of Development (and any officers designated by that officer) is authorized to: -

- determine any planning application under delegated powers (including appeals and tree work applications);
- deal with enforcement complaints (including deciding on the expediency of taking/not taking action and issuing enforcement notices and taking any further action, including prosecution, required to secure compliance with a decision of the Council);
- deal with all types of appeal and their format;
- deal with all other decisions and correspondence required under any relevant local government, social, planning, listed building, conservation, building and environmental and any other relevant legislation;
- nominate officers to represent the Council on forums and working parties;
- authorise officers to enter land and buildings in the course of their duties;
- enter into, modify or discharge planning or legal agreements securing controls over development (e.g. Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act);
- set charges for copying, planning history searches, high hedge applications and discretionary fees for Local Land Charges;
- refuse applications following a resolution to grant permission or consent if the required legal agreements are not completed by the applicant within the timeframe set out in the officer's report.
- institute judicial reviews in consultation with the head of legal services

Provided that: -

1. On planning applications, the Wiltshire Council Division Member has not requested in writing that the application proceed to determination by way of the relevant area committee. However: -
  - a. Any request must be received within 21 days of the circulation of the weekly list of 'applications received' in which it appears, and set out the material planning consideration(s) which warrant the application going before committee.
  - b. Applications for householder development, listed building consents to alter/extend and conservation area consents will normally be dealt with under delegated powers.
  - c. Applications for advertisements, tree work, prior approvals, Certificates of Lawfulness and notifications will not be eligible for call-in and will be dealt with under delegated powers.
  - d. Applications made by an elected member or a senior officer of the Council or their close relations, where representations objecting to the application have been received will be determined by committee (delegation will still be permitted if the application is to be refused)
2. The following applications shall be dealt with by the Strategic Planning Committee:
  - Large-scale major developments (defined by CLG as those of 200 houses or more or 10,000 square metres of non-residential floor space) which, by their nature (e.g. scale, location etc.) have wider strategic implications and raise issues of more than local importance;

- Planning applications for mineral extraction or waste disposal, other than small scale works which are ancillary to an existing mineral working or waste disposal facility.
  - Applications, which if approved, would represent a significant departure from the policies of the statutory development plan, where they are recommended for approval;
  - Applications called in by a Division Member that cross the boundary of two area committees
  - Any application that the Director of Development deems raises issues that should be considered by the Strategic Planning Committee
3. There will be occasions where it would be possible to deal with certain applications under delegated powers but where the Director of Development considers it inappropriate to do so, having considered any public representation and consultee responses. In these cases the applications will be determined by an appropriate planning committee.

## **Definitions**

Planning application means any application submitted to the Council for determination and included within the Governments' PS1 and PS2 returns;

Large scale major development means any application for 200 or more houses; residential development of 4ha or more or other development of more than 10,000 square metres or more than 2 ha, as defined by the Government in the PS1/2 return.

Householder development and the other descriptions of development referred to above shall have the meaning ascribed to them in the Government's PS1/2 return.

Enforcement notices includes all other formal notices under the Planning Acts used to investigate and remedy alleged breaches of planning control or improve the appearance of an area, including Breach of condition notices and Section 215 notices.

A close relation is defined as spouse, partner, sibling, parent or offspring.

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**Extract from DCLG proposals for dealing with non delegated applications between the 31st March 2009 and the elections.**

***Regulatory committees***

- 1) In the light of concerns that preparing councils which are county councils which under the relevant structural change order are required to hold elections of their councillors in 2009 (i.e. Cornwall, Shropshire and Wiltshire) that, owing to a lack of members with relevant experience and the small number of members overall, it might be difficult to maintain high quality and fully operational planning and licensing committees, we intend to make the following transitional provision.
- 2) Subject to final confirmation, we intend to make regulations containing permissive powers that would:
  - a) enable the Implementation Executive to co-opt members of the Implementation Executive who were nominated by a predecessor council onto a regulatory committee (licensing or planning) of the new single tier council, and for those members to be voting members of those committees, until the fourth day after the next following day of election of councillors to that council;
  - b) enable the Implementation Executive to co-opt members of regulatory committees of predecessor councils onto a regulatory committee of the new single tier council, and for those members to be voting members of those committees, until the fourth day after the next following day of election of councillors to that council.
- 3) In addition, since the regulatory committees of the preparing councils which have not yet held elections will be exercising district-council functions in the period from the reorganisation date until the fourth day after the 2009 elections, it is important that these committees reflect the democratic mandate of both tiers of local government and embody the new single tier council as nearly as possible. We therefore intend to provide that the regulatory committees of the new single tier councils shall, between the reorganisation date and the fourth day after the 2009 elections, reflect the political balance of the Implementation Executive (rather than that of the preparing council).

## Briefing Note:

### Dealing with planning applications - the implications of parish council call-in rights

#### Purpose

This report considers the implications of allowing parish councils to have the right to call-in planning applications to the area planning committees of the new unitary council.

#### Background

In recent years, Councils across the country have had to review the number of applications being dealt with by planning committee. This has been due to a number of factors that include:

- **Increased public involvement in committees:** Nearly all planning committees now allow members of the public to address them. This has put pressure on the number of applications that can realistically be considered by committees as the time available for debate is reduced by the time taken by public speaking;
- **Rise of systems thinking:** There has been an increased focus in the public sector on making the best use of scarce resources, including the time of both officers and members. The emphasis has been on taking decisions at the right level, which in planning has led to committees becoming increasingly focused on important and controversial applications requiring informed debate, whilst minor applications and householder decisions are dealt with by officers under delegated powers.
- **Performance Management:** The Government has set local authorities targets for the speed at which they determine planning applications. This has similarly led to authorities seeking to reduce the number of minor applications going to planning committees to enable targets to be met. It is also a factor of customer demand, in that agents and applicants seek a speedy planning decision.
- **Increased complexity of applications:** Councils now have far more material considerations to take into account than existed even 10 years ago. This means that applications presented to committee have to be explained in ever more detailed reports that not only take more time to prepare, but also lead to longer debate. This again puts pressure on the number of applications that can be realistically considered at a meeting.

As a result of these pressures, most of the Councils in Wiltshire have adapted their Schemes of Delegation to deal with these changes. The current situation is that no parish call-in exists in either Salisbury District Council or North Wiltshire District Council. Some limited rights remain in Kennet but West Wiltshire is the only district where full call-in powers still exist and where all planning applications opposed by parish and town councils still have to go to committee where they are recommended for approval by an officer.

### Current Performance

The table below shows the performance of the district councils in dealing with planning applications within the Government set national targets in 2007/08:

	Major applications (Target 60% within 13 weeks)	Minor applications (Target 65% within 8 weeks)	Householder and other applications (Target 80% within 8 weeks)	Number of applications delegated to officers
North Wilts	80%	73%	85%	<b>94%</b>
Salisbury	66%	78%	89%	<b>95%</b>
Kennet	70%	77%	90%	<b>95%</b>
West Wilts	23%	48%	70%	<b>85%</b>

The table shows that the performance by West Wilts was the worst of all the four districts and that it had the lowest level of delegation to officers. Tables published in August by DCLG show that West Wilts was one of only 17 local planning authorities out of more than 380 that failed to meet any of the national performance indicators for dealing with planning applications in 2007/08.

Further analysis of the West Wilts figures indicates that almost 60% of the applications being dealt with at the Planning Committee were there solely because parish/town councils objected to an application that officers recommended for approval. This amounted to 182 applications. Of these 182, the officer recommendation was accepted on 86% of the applications, being overturned only 26 times. Of the 26, 19 have since gone to appeal and the authority has won only 4 of the 16 decisions made to date. In effect, this means that the current system of parish council call-in has led to officer decisions being reversed on fewer than 8% of the reports that have had to be written. It has to be questioned whether the value being added by a figure as low as this is proportionate to the cost to local taxpayers, applicant and agents of a system that requires additional committee reports, committee meetings and appeals and that delivers performance figures that are amongst the very worst in the country.

Kennet also currently allows parish council objections to trigger a report to committee where officers are minded to approve an application, although objections to householder applications only go forward where the ward member supports them. In 2007/08, this system led to 21 applications being dealt with at committee, 22% of the total number of applications considered. In 19 cases, the officer recommendation was accepted. Of the two refusals, one was subsequently challenged and reversed on appeal. This means that the officer recommendation was reversed on fewer than 5% of the reports that had to be written.

Neither Salisbury nor North Wilts currently operate a system that allows parish council objections to trigger a committee report. In the case of Salisbury, the scheme of delegation was changed to remove this requirement when performance sank to a level that left the authority as a 'standards' authority challenged to improve performance by the Government. The before and after analysis indicates that the

number of committee reports required fell by over 20% and performance improved to the figures shown above. Similarly, Kennet revised its scheme of delegation in 2006, removing the automatic call-in by parishes objecting to household applications and also raising the number of objections required to trigger a committee report. As a result, the number of small-scale householder applications being considered by the committee reduced significantly and the overall number of committee reports required has fallen by 41%.

### **Conclusion**

The new unitary council needs to adopt the best practices used both nationally and established within the county if it is to be successful. The figures set out above clearly show that the best performing authorities in Wiltshire do not have a parish council call-in and that where it is in use, the reality has been that it has provided very little value added benefit at a heavy cost.

If the parish-council call-in system were to be adopted, it is difficult to see how the performance of the area office at Trowbridge could be significantly improved, whilst the number of applications considered by committee at the other area offices would significantly increase. This would increase the Council's costs and lead to a reduced performance and efficiency.

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