

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 April 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **18 April 2002** when there were present:

Cllr D A Weir – Chairman

Cllr R Adams

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn

Cllr A Hosking

Cllr P J Morgan

Cllr M G B Starke

Cllr R E Vingoe

Cllr P F A Webster

Cllr Mrs M A Weir

NON MEMBERS ATTENDING

Cllrs C I Black and Mrs J M Giles

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	– Chief Executive
S Scutton	– Head of Planning Services
A Bugeja	– Head of Legal Services
S Worthington	– Committee Administrator

168 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 MARCH 2002

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

169 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL/BUILDING CONTROL BEST VALUE REVIEW – FINAL REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services outlining the final conclusions of the Best Value Review Member Working Group into Development Control and Building Control services and presenting a detailed action plan for service improvement.

The Committee discussed the action plan in detail and agreed with many of the actions proposed without amendment. The following were agreed by Members following further debate and minor amendments to the original proposals.

Page 6.11 – Introduce Member Training as a Pre-Qualification for Sitting on the Planning Committee

Members noted that it could be argued that training should be provided for functions other than planning, such as finance or the environment. Members were unaware of any Government publications which stated that planning training was mandatory.

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The Committee suggested the following re-wording of the objective:-

“To encourage Members of the Planning Committee to have the requisite skills and understanding of planning to exercise decision making powers. Training sessions to run on a cycle to coincide with newly elected Members”.

It was additionally noted that this objective was dependent on the outcome of any decision relating to the size of membership of the Planning Services Committee.

Page 6.12 – Introduce a ‘Cooling-Off’ Period for the Planning Committee

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that, by deferring an application for a ‘cooling-off’ period, the authority could run the risk of appeal for non determination of the application. It was, however, perceived that such a risk would be small. It was the general consensus of the Committee that this proposal was a positive one, and that the wording should be altered slightly to read:-

“To avoid likelihood of decisions being made by the committee that may result in a costs award”.

Page 6.12 - Introduce a Procedure for Site Visits to be Made in Advance of Planning Committee Meetings

Responding to Member questions, Officers confirmed that no Member requests for site visits would be refused. It was therefore suggested that the wording of the objective should be altered, as follows:-

“To ensure that no unnecessary delay is introduced into the decision making process. Delegate to the Head of Planning Services to decide on site visits, but Members to be able to request visits within 14 days of the receipt of the Parish List. All requests for site visits will be granted. Members no longer able to request site visits at Planning Committee”

Page 6.13 – Review Level of Delegations

It was suggested that the wording of this objective should be amended to read:-

“To ensure that only major applications are considered by the Planning Committee in accordance with BVPI 188 – subject to a review of delegations”.

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Page 6.13 – Internal IT Requirements to be Developed in a Phased Programme: Install Upgrade to CAPS – UNI-form Spatial, Including Planning and Building Control

Officers would provide Members with details of the costs associated with this objective.

Page 6.15 – Internal IT Requirements to be Developed in a Phased Programme: Improve the Availability and Scope of Information on the Intranet for Officers and Elected Members

It was suggested that the wording of this objective should be amended to read:-

“To make best use of information technology to provide information about planning and building control to Rochford District Council Officers and elected Members”.

Page 6.22 – To Evaluate and Utilise a Broad Range of Outlets to Publicise the Planning Service and to Provide Guidance on Planning and Building Control Issues Including Website – Weekly List, Parish List, Application Forms, Progress of Applications, Appeals Register, Local Plan Information, Links to other Organisations, Committee Agenda, Planning Schedules and Minutes

Members concurred that, in addition to availability on the Council website, paper copies should continue to be provided of all such Planning documentation.

Page 6.23 - To Evaluate and Utilise a Broad Range of Outlets to Publicise the Planning Service and to Provide Guidance on Planning and Building Control Issues Including Estate Agents Packs

It was noted that there might be sponsorship opportunities associated with this initiative in due course.

Page 6.26 – Introduce a Development Team Approach

It was noted that all Members should be kept updated on the progress of schemes that trigger this procedure, subject to developer confidentiality.

Page 6.28 – Remove Ward Member Names from Planning Schedule – Ward Members not Automatically Called as First Speaker in Committee

It was the general consensus of the Committee that a list of Members' names and wards should be included at the beginning of the Planning Schedule rather than Ward Members' details appearing with details of

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each individual application. Courtesy at meeting should also be observed in that Ward Members should be called first to speak.

Page 6.30 – Issues Relating to the Process for Dealing with Planning Applications, Including Time Taken to Reach a Decision on Applications

It was suggested that the wording of this objective be changed to read:-

“To introduce a significant change in the speed with which planning applications are processed by the authority beyond the national target of 80%”.

Page 6.31 – Issues Relating to the Process for Dealing with Planning Applications, Including More Closely Linking Neighbour Consultation Letters with the Issue of Site Notices

It was noted that there was potentially a problem in more rural areas of the District whereby neighbours may not necessarily receive consultation letters.

Page 6.35 – Review Contents of Neighbour Notification Letters

It was noted that all Members should be sent copies of updated neighbour consultation letters, once available.

The Committee was unable to make a positive recommendation on the following two actions, which Members felt should not be implemented. (See Appendix 2, attached to the signed copy of these Minutes)

Page 6.29 – Remove requirement for Ward Member Consultation when Agreeing Minor Amendments to Applications First Determined by the Planning Committee

There was concern that professional judgment in determining what were minor amendment requests could be queried by residents who might perceive certain minor planning amendments as more substantial. Members concurred that Ward Members could help to alleviate such a situation and therefore concluded that this proposed action should not be agreed.

Page 6.34 – Organise a Regular Focus Group on Planning

Members believed that this proposed action should also not be agreed.

Members concurred that the first proposal of the action plan, to reduce the size of the Planning Committee, should be referred to Full Council for determination, given the importance of this issue to all Members.

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On a motion moved by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr R E Vingoe it was:-

Resolved

That the objective to reduce the size of the Planning Committee be referred to Full Council for determination. (HPS)

It was further **resolved**

- (1) That the objective to organise a regular focus group on planning be referred to Full Council with a recommendation that this should not be approved.
- (2) That the objective to remove the requirement for Ward Member consultation when agreeing minor amendments to applications first determined by the Planning Committee be referred to Full Council with a recommendation that this should not be approved. (HPS)

The Committee further **Resolved** to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council:

- (1) That the objective relating to redesigning Planning Reception in Acacia House be deferred pending future asset management deliberations. (HPS)
- (2) That the revised action plan (appendix 1, attached to the signed copy of these Minutes) be approved. (HPS)

170 ROCHFORD DISTRICT REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN – FURTHER POLICIES AND PLANNING GUIDANCE

Members believed, as a result of the lateness of the hour, that this item should be deferred to the next meeting of this Committee in the new municipal year so that proper consideration could be given to the issue. Members should send detailed comments on the report to the Head of Planning Services for circulation to all Committee Members well in advance of the next scheduled meeting.

Resolved

That consideration of the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan – Further Policies and Planning Guidance be deferred to the next meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee. (HPS)

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The meeting closed at 10.10 pm.

Chairman _____

Date _____