

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE PLANNING SERVICES (NOW DEVELOPMENT CONTROL) COMMITTEE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the recommendations of the Planning Committee Review Sub-Committee held on 5 June 2006 on the arrangements for the future operation of the Development Control Committee.

2 DECISION

- 2.1 The Sub-Committee considered in detail the arrangements for the operation of the Development Control Committee. As well as analysing questionnaire returns from authorities in the same Audit Commission family group, the Sub-Committee made visits to East Cambridgeshire District Council and Brentwood Borough Council, and considered evidence from a representative of the local media and the findings of two focus groups.
- 2.2 The Sub-Committee was disappointed that Mr I Davidson, the Council's Audit Commission Relationship Manager, had been unable to attend their meeting to provide an outside perspective on their emerging conclusions. The Sub-Committee asked that he be invited to attend the Council meeting at which their recommendations would be discussed. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this report, it looks as if Mr Davidson has a prior commitment that will prevent him from attending.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The recommendations of the Planning Committee Review Sub-Committee to Council are as follows:-
- (1) That the Development Control Committee should comprise all 39 Members of the Council.
 - (2) That public speaking should be introduced, within the framework of appendix 1 to this report, subject to the time allowed for public speaking being limited to 'up to 5 minutes' each for the applicant/representative, one objector and the Parish Council.
 - (3) That all Members of the Development Control Committee should be encouraged to attend scheduled planning site visits, or to familiarise themselves with the sites if unable to attend to ensure they have sufficient information on those applications.
 - (4) That a book should be made available before Committee meetings for Members to sign to confirm that they had attended any organised site visits, had alternatively made an individual visit to the sites, or were familiar with the sites for other reasons including their role as a Ward Member.

- (5) That there should be improved pointers/cursors for the officer presentations.
- (6) That webcasting or oral broadcasting was desirable, but would require further investigation; a report should be made in due course to the Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee.
- (7) That all Members of the Development Control Committee should attend two mandatory planning training sessions totalling four hours in each Municipal year, or make alternative training arrangements with officers if unable to attend scheduled sessions, otherwise sanctions might be considered.

4 OTHER MATTERS

- 4.1 Subject to the final decisions taken by Council on the recommendations of the Sub-Committee, several administrative issues will need to be considered and agreed.
- 4.2 It is suggested that, if public speaking is agreed, this be implemented for the Development Control Committee after the summer recess. Similarly, if agreed, the revised arrangements for site visits could be implemented at the same time.
- 4.3 With regard to webcasting or oral broadcasting, it is proposed that a report be prepared for the meeting of the Policy, Finance and Strategic Performance Committee scheduled for 17 October 2006.
- 4.4 Finally, in relation to the basic administration of public speaking, it will be necessary to agree where within the Council Chamber speakers will be positioned. This is a matter that may require some initial experimentation, but it is proposed that speakers sit at the back of the Chamber and, when called forward by the Chairman, they stand on the Chairman's left near to the entrance door, where a microphone stand can be located.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The costs of operating the Development Control Committee with all Members of the Council versus a smaller Committee were carefully considered. It was concluded that, given the arrangements for paying allowances, there would be no meaningful savings resulting from a reduction in the size of the Committee.
- 5.2 The efficiency and effectiveness of the Development Control Committee versus a smaller Committee were considered particularly in light of the visits to East Cambridgeshire and Brentwood and the findings of the focus groups.
- 5.3 The Committees at East Cambridgeshire and Brentwood do not operate more efficiently and effectively when assessed against the performance of the comparison authorities.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Council **RESOLVES** to consider the seven recommendations of the Planning Committee Review Sub-Committee set out under paragraph 3 above and determine the changes to be made to the Development Control Committee to be brought into operation from 1 September 2006 where agreed.

Shaun Scrutton

Head of Planning & Transportation

Background Papers:-

None

For further information please contact Shaun Scrutton on:-

Tel:- 01702 318 100

E-Mail:- shaun.scrutton@rochford.gov.uk