

PLANNING AGENT AND PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOPS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views on the detailed arrangements for evening workshop sessions with planning agents and parish councils.
- 1.2 This is a non-statutory requirement, but the proposals accord with the principles of Best Value in seeking to develop a more focused customer perspective of the delivery of the planning service.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 A Best Value Review of the development control and building control service is underway and it is considered that there would be significant value in arranging for evening workshops to be held with Planning Agents and Parish/Town Councils.

3 PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS

- 3.1 The central theme of the Best Value regime is to take a customer perspective of service delivery and to seek to develop productive partnership working. Regular meetings with planning agents and Parish Councils offer an ideal opportunity to better understand the needs of service users and, at the same time, to build better working partnerships with Parish Councils.

Planning Agents

- 3.2 A number of planning agents, perhaps thirty or so, are repeat users of the planning service. Regular users develop a good understanding of the processes and often develop fairly close working relationships with officers. Their views on the way that the department operates have the potential to offer valuable insight and present key opportunities to make positive changes to service delivery.
- 3.3 It is suggested that all agents making more than three applications to the planning authority be invited to an evening workshop once per year to discuss the process, with a report on the session being presented to this Committee. Whilst such an event might be attended by Members or even chaired by the Chairman of Planning Services committee, it is considered that the first session should be run by the Head of Planning Services with one of the issues to be discussed being views on whether agents would welcome a dialogue with elected Members at

future meetings. The key focus of the first meeting would be the Best Value Review.

Parish/Town Councils

- 3.4 The consultation arrangements with Parish Councils form an integral part of the development control process. Parish/Town Councils can send a representative along to the Planning Committee to speak on a particular application, though in practice this right is not generally exercised.
- 3.5 There has always been a concern that the local planning authority regularly makes decisions contrary to the recommendations of Parish/Town Councils. Analysis of decisions show that is not the case, and in any event, the planning authority must make decisions based on the planning merits of each case.
- 3.6 There is a need to ensure that Parish/Town Councils understand the framework within which the planning authority must operate and an annual workshop would provide an opportunity for representatives from Parish/Town Councils to meet with representatives from the planning authority (elected Members and officers) to discuss the planning system. A summary of the event could be prepared and circulated to all elected Members at district and parish levels.
- 3.7 In this case, it is considered that the Chairman of Planning Services should chair such an event, with several Member representatives of the planning authority, and that one elected Member and the Parish/Town clerk be invited to attend for each parish. Once again, the focus of the first meeting would be the Best Value Review.

4 WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 If Members are minded to agree the principle for these events, it is proposed that arrangements be put in place to run both for the first time as quickly as possible in order to feed information into the Best Value Review.
- 4.2 The ideal time for future meetings with Parish/Town Councils may very well be in May alongside other training sessions for district Members, and it is suggested that, if the first meeting is successful, then this pattern be established in May 2002.
- 4.3 If the event for agents proves to be useful, it is suggested this become a regular event each year after the summer recess.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There will be a requirement for some small resource provision to enable these events to take place. It is likely, given the numbers

involved, that the sessions would need to be run in the Freight House, but the resource implications for room fees and light refreshments are not significant and can be met from within current resources.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That arrangements be made for workshop sessions with Parish/Town Councils and planning agents as outlined in the report. (HPS)

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