

## **REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines the context for the review of the operation of the Planning Services Committee, explains progress to date and the way forward to the completion of the review.

### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The review of the operation of the Planning Services Committee is one of the Council's key priorities for 2005/2006.
- 2.2 A number of reports have been presented to the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee and these have been appended to this report, as follows:-
- 20 September 2005 – results of a questionnaire survey sent to all Authorities in the Audit Commission family group of Authorities that includes Rochford, plus all Authorities in Essex;
  - 18 October 2005 – report providing statistical information on the operation of the Committee and a look at financial perspectives;
  - 14 December 2005 – a report summarising and considering the main issues requiring a decision. The report included an update on a survey of the Parish and Town Councils and a survey of all District Members.
- 2.3 The meeting on 20 December made several recommendations to the Environmental Services Committee on 11 January 2006. These were as follows:-
- that all Members continue to serve on the Planning Services Committee;
  - that there be no change to the arrangements for deferment or site visits;
  - that a compulsory training session of up to four hours duration (not continuous) be introduced for all Members of the Committee, subject to appropriate arrangements being in place should someone fall ill or be unable to attend for some significant reason.
- 2.4 The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee also decided that public speaking should be introduced to the Planning Services Committee but before referring this matter to the Environmental Services Committee for a final decision, agreed to examine the procedural arrangements.
- 2.5 At the Environmental Services Committee on 11 January, it was agreed that prior to taking a final decision on the review of the Planning Services

Committee, it would be appropriate to carry out some further work and accordingly this task and finish Sub-Committee was set up.

### **3 ISSUES TO CONSIDER**

3.1 The issues for the Sub-Committee to consider are:-

- the size of the Planning Services Committee
- role of non-members if the Committee is reduced in size
- the effectiveness of a smaller Committee
- public speaking
- compulsory training.

#### **Size of the Committee**

3.2 The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee concluded that no case had been demonstrated to justify the creation of a smaller Planning Services Committee, notwithstanding the views expressed by the Audit Commission in a recent report on East Hampshire's planning services.

3.3 However, there is no doubt that, given the very strong views expressed by the Audit Commission on the appropriate size for a Planning Committee, it is important for the Council's review to fully explore all aspects of the issue. Accordingly, in setting up the Sub-Committee, the Environmental Services Committee considered it to be important for there to be a comprehensive review of the size of the Committee, to include visits to view the operation of smaller Planning Committees in other authorities, obtain the views of a meeting of the Residents' Focus Panel, and seek comments and input from the local press.

#### **Public Speaking**

3.4 The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee concluded there was justification for public speaking to be introduced to the Planning Services Committee, subject to an examination of the procedural arrangements. A draft protocol has been circulated and it is suggested that the Sub-Committee examines this as part of its work.

#### **Compulsory Training**

3.5 The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommended the introduction of some compulsory training and it is suggested the Sub-Committee considers the detailed arrangements.

**4 RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RESOLVES**

To consider the further work and analysis required to complete the review of the operation of the Planning Services Committee.

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**Background Papers:-**

None.

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