
THE OPERATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Following a request from the Review Committee, this report attempts to examine the reasons for the reduction in Member numbers agreed by Full Council on 20 October 2015, and to see if this has led to a better decision making process.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Council on 20 October 2015 passed a motion that the size of the Development Committee be changed from 39 to 13 Members with effect from the meeting scheduled for 19 November 2015.

Observations made supporting the motion included that:-

- No other Council has the same archaic system of an all Member Development Committee.
- Decisions made at the Development Committee should not be taken politically, but rather in accordance with national planning policy.
- Non Committee Members will be able to represent their residents without being bound by regulations around pre-determination/impartiality.
- In the past Members have refused planning applications for reasons not related to planning policy; a smaller committee will enable Members to develop expertise and make focused, planning decisions.

Observations made opposing the motion included that:-

- Reducing the size of the Committee would result in a dilution of democracy as it would be prone to political control and non-Group Members would be excluded.
- The District was part urban, part rural and it would be preferable to have all Ward Members contributing to the decision-making to ensure a better geographical representation.
- It was premature to introduce any change in the size of the Committee; this would be timelier after all-out elections in May 2016, which would also allow time to consult with Parishes/residents.

- 2.2 The report below considers if there is any evidence that the reduced size of the Development Committee has impacted upon the decision-making process of the Committee.

3 Planning Appeals

- 3.1 The table sets out applications considered by the Development Committee that have consequently gone to appeal, and the outcome of the appeal, for approximately a 2-year period either side of the change in Development Committee size. The table further comments on whether the appeal outcome is in agreement with the original Planning Officer recommendation, or the Committee decision.

Planning Application Reference	Date of Decision	Officer Recom	Committee Decision	Appeal Outcome	In agreement with:
14/00429/FUL	7/4/14	Approve	Refuse	Dismissed	Committee
13/00469/FUL	28/10/13	Refuse	Refuse	Allowed	Neither
14/00138/COU	22/7/14	Approve	Refuse	Dismissed	Committee
07/00297/OUT	8/1/15	Approve	Refuse	Dismissed	Committee
14/00687/FUL	9/2/15	Approve	Refuse	Dismissed	Committee
14/00892/FUL	6/3/15	Approve	Refuse	Allowed	Officer
15/00084/FUL	20/5/15	Refuse	Refuse	Dismissed	Both
Introduction of the reduced size of Development Committee					
15/00595/FUL	29/4/16	Refuse	Refuse	Dismissed	Both
16/0184/FUL	30/1/17	Approve	Refuse	Dismissed	Committee
16/01243/FUL	27/3/17	Approve	Refuse	Dismissed	Committee

- 3.2 The table below provides details on the number of applications that were decided by the Committee per year.

Municipal Year	No. of applications heard by the Committee
2013-14	39
2014-15	27
2015 (May to October)	15
2015 – 16 (November 2015 onwards)	17
2016-17	35
2017-18	34

- 3.3 It can be noted that there appears to be a reduction in the number of appeals being made by planning applicants since the introduction of the new committee structure when compared with the previous 2-year period.
- 3.4 Further, there have not been any appeals won by the appellant since the introduction of the smaller committee size. However, as the sample size is

small it would be ill advised to draw any significant conclusion from the above table, and any inference that the data presents should be treated with caution.

- 3.5 It could be argued that, following the change in the numbers of Councillors on the Committee, more effective training can be given both to Committee Members and substitute Members, which has resulted in a better understanding of the planning process; Members, therefore, arrive at more consistent final decisions.
- 3.6 A further argument is that the changes in personnel, or approach by existing officers, may also result in greater consistency in views between Members of the Committee and officers.
- 3.7 However, due to the subjective nature of the assessment; the size of data set, and the lack of a single clear causative factor, a conclusion cannot be reached upon the nature of the impact, if any, of reducing the size of the Committee.

Committee Size

- 3.8 The table below outline the stated number of Members for each planning committee in Essex.

Essex Authorities*	Number of Members on Planning Committee	Number of Councillors	Percentage of Councillors on Planning Committee
Basildon	8	42	19%
Braintree	13	49	6%
Brentwood	12	37	32%
Castle point	15	41	36%
Chelmsford	10	57	18%
Colchester	10	51	20%
Harlow	10	33	30%
Epping	17	58	29%
Rochford	13	39	33%
Southend	20	51	39%
Tendring	11	60	18%
Thurrock	9	49	18%
Uttlesford	10	39	25%
Average	11.9		

* excluding Maldon District Council that has retained an area committee system

- 3.9 It can be noted that the average size of committee is approximately 12 Members, with the size of committee ranging from 8 to 20 Members. It can also be noted that compared to the other Councils in Essex Rochford has the third largest percentage of Council Members making up the Planning Committee. Therefore, it can be concluded that the number of Members making up the Rochford Committee is broadly in line with other planning committees across the county.

Conclusion

- 3.10 The narrow range of data and the number of contributory factors affecting planning decision outcomes means that a conclusion on the effect of the size of the planning committee cannot be successfully drawn.
- 3.11 Further, the similarity in size of the committee in comparison to that of other planning committees in the county would suggest that it is a reasonable size of committee to maintain at this time.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and found there to be no impacts (either positive or negative) on protected groups as defined under the Equality Act 2010

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the content of the report.



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Background Papers:-

None.

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