

Planning Advisory Panel

Report of the Planning Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That the Planning Advisory Panel be replaced with all Member briefings.

SUMMARY:

- The report considers replacing the Planning Advisory Panel with all Member briefings. The briefings will be organised as required.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Members play a valuable role in the formulation and review of planning policy. The Council's informal Members' panel, the Planning Advisory Panel, provides the forum for Members to be briefed and views to be raised.
- 1.2 The Planning Advisory Panel was last reviewed in 2019 the outcome of which was agreed by Cabinet. There is now an opportunity to revisit that review and consider whether there is merit in retaining the Planning Advisory Panel.

2 Background

- 2.1 Planning policy documents establish the planning framework for the Borough. The Head of Planning Policy & Economic Development is responsible for advising the Council on planning policy issues at a national, sub regional and local level. The planning policy element of the Service is responsible for taking planning documents through the necessary processes and monitoring their application.
- 2.2 As a mechanism for greater Member involvement in the planning policy process an informal Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) was established. The PAP has been in place for a number of years. PAP is not a decision making body but provide an opportunity for Members to be briefed on planning policy including the review of evidence, the implications for Government guidance and case law on the Boroughs strategic planning function and for Members to raise any issues they may have.
- 2.3 The function and role of councillors in the planning policy process was considered as part of the OSCOM Review into member involvement in the preparation of planning policy. This review reported to Cabinet on 1 June 2016 and its recommendations were approved. A subsequent OSCOM review was reported to Cabinet on 2 November 2016 and was noted.

- 2.4 In September 2019 Cabinet reviewed the arrangements and membership of the PAP. It was confirmed that the core membership of PAP would comprise 16 Councillors. The membership would be politically proportionate with each party nominating their chosen representatives. As a result of both reviews the PAP meetings have been open to all Members to receive agendas, attend and participate. This in effect gave all Members an equal position in any discussion, making it a more inclusive format, remembering that PAP is a non-decision making body. Since these measures were put in place, PAP has not met since 2019 and then only infrequently. When there has been opportunity to engage with Members, the more recent approach has been to hold all Member briefings rather than use the more formal setting of PAP. When PAP has met, the items discussed could equally have been presented as a briefing session.
- 2.5 As the Council moves forward with drafting the next Local Plan and considering other strategic planning issues there is an opportunity to re-evaluate whether the current PAP model should be retained or replaced with Member briefings/workshops.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 Improving the way in which the Council develops and implements its planning policies will help, either directly or indirectly, deliver the corporate objectives.

4 Consultations/Communications

- 4.1 Ensuring that Councillors are briefed on the strategic planning process for the Borough is key. The recommendation proposed aims to improve ongoing involvement with all Members.

5 Options

- 5.1 The options are to consider whether the PAP should be retained, or replaced with Member briefings/workshops.

6 Option Appraisal

- 6.1 There remains value in having a forum in which Councillors can be involved in the preparation of planning policy documents. Their experience and insight can, albeit on an informal basis, help inform possible future reviews of policy in combination with other material factors e.g. case law, national guidance.
- 6.2 In replacing PAP with all Member briefings it would still allow for Councillors to be involved in the preparation of planning policy documents and briefed on strategic planning issues. For example, in the drafting of the Issues & Options document for the next Local Plan all Member workshops were held. This allowed Members to highlight particular concerns.
- 6.3 All Member briefings would remove the perceived confusion of the comparative roles between the Members that attend. It would also provide more opportunity for a greater range of Members to be engaged in the strategic planning process.

6.4 The briefings would be organised when required with the necessary e-agendas still produced, if relevant. The format of the session would vary depending on the topic being discussed. Given the success of the recent virtual meetings it is proposed that these briefings would continue to take place online as much as possible. By doing so it is hoped to make it easier for Members to attend as well as reducing travel. This is especially the case where, as we move through the local plan review process, the number of sessions increases.

6.5 Based on the points outlined, the recommended action is to replace PAP with informal Member briefings.

7 Resource Implications

7.1 The proposed recommendation can be met from within existing budget.

8 Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications of the proposed change in practice provided that Member involvement acts in a purely advisory capacity and is not a decision making body.

9 Equality Issues

9.1 An EQIA screening had been completed in accordance with the Council's EQIA methodology and no potential for unlawful discrimination or negative impact has been identified, therefore a full EQIA has not been carried out.

10 Other Issues

10.1 Community Safety – None.

10.2 Environmental Health Issues – None.

10.3 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate – none, save for the potential to host briefings virtually and the resultant reduction in travel for Councillors and officers.

10.4 Property Issues – None.

10.5 Wards/Communities Affected – All.

11 Conclusion

11.1 Members have an important role to play in the process of preparing, approving and implementing the Council's planning policies. The proposed recommendation to replace the Planning Advisory Panel with all Member briefings provides greater opportunity for informal Member engagement and involvement in planning policy.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

None

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:

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Report to:

Cabinet

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