

Test Valley Borough Council - Council - 10 April 2019



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participants were. As part of the interviews there were several comment about the relationship of North and South Members and the comments that can ensue in relation to the referral and the relevant area committees approaches. The comments and apparent relationship issues were not considered to appear 'professional' and undermined the overall standing of the committee and reflects poorly upon the Council.

- Site Visits: The Viewing Panel takes place on the Friday before the committee, there were several comments about the timing that precluded many Members that work attending. There is a limited attendance at the Panels (8 or 9 out of 24). At the Panel, Members appear to understand that they should not talk to anyone when visiting the site but panel management can be tricky if the Panel do not remain in a group.
- Pre-Meeting /Planning Committee Briefings of Members: The pre-meeting, is a meeting of officers and Chair and Vice Chair to run through the agenda and key issues. In accordance with the code of conduct, there is no apparent planning pre-meeting on party political grounds or any party political 'whipping'

8.2 Committee Management – Conclusions and Recommendation:

Conclusions:

- The overall scale of the committees can, and does, give rise to issues that affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the decision making and provide a poor experience for the public and customers of the planning service.
- There appears to be a view that the process could be improved and a will by some, but not all, to change the current committee structures. Restructuring the committees and creating a more focused and dedicated decision making body focused on: enabling ward members to attend the committee as an advocate for their wards and decision makers to concentrate on making decision in the wider public interest. The smaller committee would also release the executive members to focus on their portfolio and avoid any potential conflict of interest or perception of a conflict. The smaller committee will also improve the focus of the planning site visit panel

Recommendations:

- Restructure the planning committee into 1 Borough -wide committee and no planning control committee, with a membership of circa 13 members or similar to facilitate balance. OR
- If the single committee is too radical a proposal at this time, introduce an interim step of creating two small area committees and remove the Planning Control Committee.
- The creation of a single, or two smaller committee, should not include executive members enabling them to focus on their cabinet role and avoid any potential conflict of interest, or perception of a conflict.

Note: these changes will also require changes to the constitution to facilitate ward representation; and training for Members on the role of ward advocate and planning committee decision maker

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- Award of Costs workshop: case studies, from other authorities, of the circumstances and cost award to develop an understanding of unreasonable behaviour.

9. PLANNING COMMITTEE – SHOP WINDOW

Shop Window –Conclusion:

- 9.1 The planning committee/s are one of the main 'shop windows' for any council, there are people that will only ever come into direct contact with how the council operate through a planning applications. The current committees have good clear reports and visual aids, reasonable formality between officers and members, but difficult confusing layouts and are so large that is it difficult to follow proceedings which are extremely lengthy. The scale of the committee; the lack of training; confusion of ward advocate/committee decision maker roles; lack of preparation by some members; culture, in the SAPC, that members want to be seen to speak and are repetitive leading to very lengthy periods on each application (in excess of an hour) - do not result in the appearance of a 'professional' decision making body that represents the whole community. As set out above the reduction in the size of the committees, to one single committee with ongoing training will result in a committee that can make planning decision in a more effective and efficient manner for the whole of Test Valley Borough.