

PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2017 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Mrs. Hunter (Chairman)

Cllr. Thornton

Cllrs. C. Barnes, Dr. Canet, Clark, Edwards-Winsor, Horwood, McGregor, Mrs. Morris, Parson and Piper

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Gaywood

Cllrs. Esler was also present.

FAREWELL

The Chairman advised that the Strategic Planning Manager, Antony Lancaster, was leaving the Council at the end of the month. The Committee joined her in thanking him for all his work.

19. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee held on 22 June 2017 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

20. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. Horwood declared that he was now employed by UK Power Networks but he did not feel that this was a conflict with any of the items considered.

21. Actions from Previous Meetings

There were none.

22. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder for Planning reported that the Planning Department was still the busiest in the Kent County Council area. More than 70% of appeals were won despite refusing the most applications in the area.

The Government issued a consultation document last November called 'Improving Planning Performance'. The document acknowledged that much had improved but that there was still some way to go in planning performance. In order to drive up performance the document set out how improvement was incentivised. Failure to meet the targets would mean that authorities would be designated. That meant that developers could choose who determined their applications - the Council or

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the planning inspectorate. This was worrying in terms of local accountability and potentially the loss of planning fee income.

There were two performance measures the council needed to be aware of. The first one was 'speed of determination'. How fast we determined planning applications - keeping within the 8 and 13 weeks' target or where there was an extension of time agreement. The target was 60% for major development; and 70% for non-major development. The Council was currently performing above these levels.

The second one was 'quality of decision' - how many decisions were allowed on appeal. The local planning authority would be eligible for designation if 10% of an authority's total numbers of decisions on applications made during the assessment period were overturned at appeal.

The government was using data from 2 years: 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2017 in terms of applications. They would take account of appeal decisions from applications made in that time, up until 31 December 2017. Authorities would be designated in January 2018. This was a rolling programme, so for designation in January 2019 the Council would need to return the performance from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018 and then appeals up to 31 December 2019 and so on.

The Council was just under the designation level for January 2018 in terms of major applications. However, this was an ongoing performance measure and so careful thought was needed on every refusal, principally whether the reasons for refusal were defensible at appeal. This was particularly important in relation to major applications.

He said that he was happy to attend any Town or Parish Council meeting in his role as Portfolio Holder.

In response to a question the Chief Planning Officer advised that the Council was in the top quartile nationally for the number of decisions upheld at appeal. The Portfolio Holder for Planning confirmed that a training session on development management would be held in January 2018 for Town and Parish Councils who wanted to attend.

23. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

24. Budget 2018/19: Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAS)

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report which set out updates to the 2018/19 budget within the existing framework of the 10-year budget and savings plan.

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Informed by the latest information from Government and discussions with Cabinet, it was proposed that the Council continued to set a revenue budget which assumed no funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant or New Homes Bonus. This would result in the Council continuing to be financially self-sufficient as set out in its Corporate Plan.

To achieve this aim and to ensure a balanced budget position over the next 10-year period, whilst also increasing the Council's ability to be sustainable beyond that time, a savings requirement of £100,000 per annum was included. Other pressures may come out later in the budget process, such as when the Local Government Finance Settlement was announced in December. There may therefore be a requirement for further savings. Officers would continue to monitor these pressures and report the latest position to Cabinet in December.

No new growth and savings items had been proposed in the report for services applicable to this Advisory Committee. Members were given the opportunity to discuss and put forward any growth and savings suggestions.

Members considered possible growth items to assist in the appointment of a Planning Enforcement Manager, the appointment of a full-time CIL Officer, an additional Officer in Planning Policy and measures to improve recruitment and retention of Planning Officers. Members noted that the Government had proposed a ringfenced increase in planning application fees. Members considered the Building Control Team, how competitive it was and that its fees were set to recover costs.

Action: The Legal Services Team to provide the sum of legal costs from planning enforcement matters recovered per year.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That Cabinet be advised that

- a) *no growth and savings proposals had been identified in Appendix D to the report, applicable to this Advisory Committee; and*
- b) the following growth suggestions be discussed further
 - to assist in the appointment of a Planning Enforcement Manager;
 - the appointment of a full-time CIL Officer; and
 - an additional Officer in Planning Policy.
 - measures to improve recruitment and retention of Planning Officers
 - training budget for Building Control staff to encourage upskilling and retention

and that such these issues may be covered by the increase in planning application fees, a balancing of Building Control fees and revisiting SCIA 15 of 2014/15 regarding the CIL monitoring income.

25. Pre-application advice fees

The Chief Planning Officer presented the report which proposed to increase charges for pre-application advice from 1 January 2018 as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

Members considered whether the increase in fees would lead to a fall in the use of the Pre-Application Advice service. The Chief Planning Officer confirmed that this would be monitored.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the proposed changes to the pre-application charges as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed for implementation from 1 January 2018.

26. Local Plan - Issues and Options - consultation update

The Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report updating members on the findings of the recent Local Plan Issues and Options consultation which ran from 3 August to 5 October 2017 and would inform the production of the draft Local Plan. A further round of public consultation would be carried out next spring.

The Chairman thanked all those residents who responded to the consultation.

Members discussed the amended definition of brownfield land, which had been noted in the responses of the neighbouring authorities. The Planning Policy Team Leader explained that this was part of the Council's policy of ensuring that no stone was left unturned for appropriate sites. Any brownfield site would also have to be sustainable.

Members discussed the extent that local residents were more likely to support development if there was appropriate infrastructure alongside it. There was some concern that CIL spending was lagging behind development.

The Committee thanked the Planning Policy Team for their hard work and for producing the results on time.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

27. Work Plan

The Chairman advised that the draft local plan would be considered on 1 March 2018. The Committee agreed that the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 16 January 2018 should be cancelled and that the need for an additional meeting before the end of the municipal year be explored.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.40 PM

CHAIRMAN

