



**REPORT of  
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES**

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**to  
COUNCIL (EXTRAORDINARY)  
17 MAY 2018**

**RESTRUCTURE OF PLANNING COMMITTEES**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This paper follows on from the Council meeting on 2 November 2017 when the Council considered a report of the Chief Executive on the subject of the Committee Structure Review. The Report included a number of recommendations which related directly to the Committee structure for decision making relating to the determination of planning applications, and also noted that:

*Review of Area Planning Committees*

*It is recognised that the cost of providing three Area Planning Committees is high. However there are pros and cons for retaining these committees and until such time as the full effect of the Local Development Plan (LDP) is embedded we are unable to confirm that demand on these Committees will fall. It is proposed that a Member led review of the current arrangements will take place over the coming months with a report to the Council coming forward no later than May 2018.*

- 1.2 This report provides feedback on the changes to the demands on the three Area Planning Committees as the Local Development Plan (LDP) has been embedded and provides options for Members to consider regarding the proposed future operation of the Committees.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) that Members note the data showing the changes to the demands on the three Area Planning Committees since November 2017;
- (ii) that Members undertake a further review of data in September 2018, and agree at that time, either:
  - a. continuation of the three Area Planning Committees
  - b. change to a single Planning Committee for the Maldon District. This would include:
    - proposed options for structure of single planning committee for all Members to take part in the planning process in their wards;
    - schedule for implementation.

### **3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 The report of the Chief Executive to the Council on 2 November 2017 on the subject of the Committee Structure Review included a number of recommendations which related directly to decision making for the determination of planning applications. These included the implementation of a change to the Parish Trigger and the introduction of mandatory training for Members to cover core planning regulations and guidance to support and inform Members when determining planning applications. Both of these recommendations have been actioned.
- 3.2 Further, as outlined in 1.1 above, Members agreed to consider a report regarding arrangements with Area Planning Committees, following a review of the impact of the adoption of the Local Development Plan (LDP), with a report to the Council coming forward no later than May 2018.
- 3.3 To enable Members to undertake this review, an analysis has been completed, comparing the period November 2016 to January 2017 (Period 1) with the corresponding data for November 2017 to January 2018 (Period 2). The data considered for each period was:
- Number of planning applications received;
  - Number of planning permissions determined using delegated powers;
  - Number of applications considered by Area Planning Committees and the Council;
  - Average length of planning meetings;
  - Percentage of members attending meetings.
- 3.4 In summary the data showed that the number of applications received has remained largely stable with 262 applications received in Period 1 and 259 in Period 2.
- 3.5 The data does show a reduction in the number of applications considered by Area Planning Committees within each period with 39 in Period 1 and 32 in Period 2, a reduction of some 18%.
- 3.6 Most striking, was the observed reduction in the overall length of Planning Committee meetings between the two periods, with the Committees in Period 1 taking a total duration of 13 hours 37 minutes, compared to 8 hours and 52 minutes in Period 2. This was an overall reduction of 35% in the time spent at Planning Committee. This represents a significant saving in Officer and Member time in supporting the meetings.
- 3.7 **Differential costs**
- 3.7.1 There are a range of costs that are incurred at differing levels depending on the number of meetings, timings of meetings and locations of meetings.
- 3.7.2 There are a range of fixed costs incurred per meeting currently which include the issue and formatting of each agenda and review of standard items and creation and checking of minutes. It is arguable that a reduction in the number of meetings per annum will reduce these fixed costs per meeting incurred by the Council. The table in

section 3.7.5 below highlights this potential saving under the line item described pre-meeting agenda preparation and post-meeting Minutes preparation.

3.7.3 Additional allowances are payable currently to the Chairman of an Area Planning Committee. The annual cost of this was £3554.19 per Chairman in 2017 / 18; by moving to one single Area Committee it would be anticipated that only one additional Chairman's allowance would be paid, assumed to be at the rate for Programme Committee Chairmen. This would generate a saving of approximately £6,000 per annum (based on 2017 / 18 costs). Further information is provided in the table at section 3.7.5 below.

3.7.4 There are a number of additional costs associated with holding a meeting outside of Maldon District Council office hours; these include caretaking costs and the cost of providing time of in lieu to all Officers other than Directors and the Chief Executive. These additional costs have been estimated and are provided at section 3.7.5 below.

### 3.7.5 Costs Table

	<b>36 meetings (as is)</b>	<b>12 meetings evening (Single Planning Committee) *</b>	<b>12 meetings daytime (Single Planning Committee)</b>
	<b>Area Planning Committee</b>	<b>Combined</b>	<b>Combined</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Caretaker over (not South Eastern Area Planning Committee (SE))	1,407.60	469.00	0
SE cost for Burnham-on-Crouch Town Council	500.00	0	0
Post meeting minutes preparation and agreement	2,945.70	1,172.76	1,172.76
Committee Clerk attendance cost Time Off In Lieu (TOIL)	2,454.84	818.28	0
Planning Officer TOIL	2,275.92	758.64	0
Senior Planning Officer TOIL	2,953.44	984.48	0
Officer Mileage SE only **	648.00	0	0
Pre-meeting agenda preparation	3,273.12	2727.60	2727.60
Costs of Allowance for Chairman	10,962.57	4,738.92	4,738.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,421.19</b>	<b>11,669.68</b>	<b>8,639.28</b>

\* 12 evening meetings can only be achieved if the business of each meeting can be dealt with within a reasonable meeting length of 2 hours.

\*\* No allowance has been included for Member mileage currently due to uncertainty of the numbers of Members that would attend a combined meeting and the

numbers of Members that would claim mileage for this meeting as not all Members currently submit mileage claims.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The analysis of the data discussed above and presented in **APPENDIX 1**, demonstrates that the Council processes and Committees relating to Planning decisions have become more efficient in light of the adoption of the LDP and the additional changes recommended in the Committee Structure Review.
- 4.2 There has been demonstrable progress, particularly in reducing the amount of time spent with Member meetings to determine planning applications. If the progress in efficiencies continues it may be possible to condense the Members determination of applications into a single Planning Committee for the whole District.
- 4.3 It will be necessary to consider the trends that have been observed for a longer period to enable further analysis of the data for Members to make a fully informed decision, and a further report should be considered in September 2018.

#### **5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS**

- 5.1 Increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the way we present and deliver our decisions supports the corporate goal of ‘delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services’.

#### **6. IMPLICATIONS**

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of decision making provides benefits to all stakeholders.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None noted.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – None noted.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – The table in section 3.6.5 above provides information on the additional costs of both evening meetings and higher numbers of meetings.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – A reduction of evening meetings will reduce the requirements for Officers to work additional hours and in turn be entitled to TOIL.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None noted.

Background Papers: Report to the Council on 2 November 2017.

Enquiries to:

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