

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

---

**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

4 April 2012

**AUTHOR/S:** Executive Director (Corporate Services) / Legal and Democratic Services Manager

---

### **PUBLIC SPEAKING PROTOCOL – REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS AT PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

#### **Purpose**

1. To conduct a review of the public speaking protocol in the context of experience gained during the past two years.

#### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that the Planning Committee endorses the draft protocol attached at Appendix A, and adopts it for use with immediate effect.

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

3. The protocol needs to be amended in order to remain effective, relevant and understandable.

#### **Background**

4. At its meeting on 24 May 2007, Council resolved that public speaking at Planning Committee be introduced, and that the Planning Committee be authorised to review and amend the scheme at its discretion, Part 4 of the Constitution being amended accordingly.
5. Planning Committee last reviewed the protocol in April 2011. Parts of the Protocol have been rewritten in the interests of Plain English.

#### **Considerations**

6. Public speaking at Planning Committee meetings, which includes contributions from local Members not on the Committee and members of parish councils, has been well received generally, and has allowed applicants, their agents, and objectors to take a greater part in the planning application process.
7. During the past few years, public speaking has operated well, but unforeseen circumstances have arisen from time to time, which have been dealt with under the Committee Chairman's general discretionary powers. The current review proposes the incorporation of those circumstances into the written protocol. This will provide clarity and certainty for Committee members and other interested parties.
8. The attached revision does not make significant changes from the Protocol agreed 12 months ago. However, Members should note the following:
  - a) Use of the phrase 'those not on the Committee' instead of 'members of the public'. This is intended to distinguish between the different roles of supporters and objectors, parish councils, and local and other Councillors.

- b) Clearer language
- c) More straightforward discretion for the Chairman to allow, within reason, departures from the formal Protocol
- d) The suggestion that, where there are two or three local Councillors, only one of them should speak in that capacity, unless there is an opposing viewpoint

### Options

9. The Committee has the option to approve the proposed protocol, either in whole or in part or as amended, or continue with the existing protocol.

### Implications

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 10. Financial                        | None  |
| Legal                                | None  |
| Staffing                             | None  |
| Risk Management                      | None  |
| Equality and Diversity               | The protocol is available electronically and in hard copy. Provision has been made for the document to be provided in alternative formats. Democratic Services Officers can advise verbally about the protocol's main requirements. |
| Equality Impact Assessment completed | No<br>An EqIA will be carried out during 2011-12 looking at public speaking and public questions on a corporate basis   |
| Climate Change                       | None  |

### Consultations

11. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee, Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, and key officers have been consulted about the proposed revised Protocol. No adverse comments have been received.

### Consultation with Children and Young People

12. None.

### Effect on Strategic Aims

13. The introduction of, and subsequent agreement of improvements to, the public speaking scheme, enables effective engagement by residents and parish councils with the decision-making process.

### Conclusions / Summary

13. To be effective, any system of public speaking must be clearly understood. It must be seen to be fair to everyone, and members of the Planning Committee should adhere to its general principles. A system of customer feedback is in place.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- None

**Contact Officer:** Ian Senior – Democratic Services Officer  
Telephone: (01954) 713028