

Report to: Planning Committee

11 March 2020

Lead Officer: Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development

Review of Planning Committees

Executive Summary

1. The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service operates through three separate Planning Committee's. Each Committee operates slightly differently. This is because the City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Councils committee arrangements have evolved through different constitutions. The Joint Development Control also incorporates County Council members and has defined terms of reference.
2. As part of the programme of work to deliver the shared planning service, a review of the operation of the three separate Planning Committees has been commissioned, with the objective of seeking to reflect best practice and to seek to realise opportunities for improved efficiencies and greater consistency across each meeting. To support the review, the Shared Planning Service has engaged the services of the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). PAS is part of the local Government Association and is funded by the government to support the Local Government Sector to deliver good planning services.
3. The recent review of the SCDC Constitution, and proposed modification to the constitution to clarify delegation arrangements on planning applications resulted in a report on the Planning Committee considered at the meeting on 12 February. As part of the Committee's consideration of that item, it was resolved that the terms of reference of the proposed review be brought to the Planning Committee for consideration and comment. This report provides details of the current draft scope for the project (Appendix 1) and invites members to comment upon and agree the proposed scope of the review as outlined.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Planning Committee:
 - (a) Comment upon the scope of the PAS Peer review as outlined in Paragraph 4 above.
 - (b) Subject to (a) above agree the scope of the PAS Peer review.

Reasons for Recommendation

5. The review of the Planning Committee arrangements provides an opportunity to improve the quality, consistency and understanding of the committee process in Greater Cambridge.

Details

6. The Shared Planning Service has asked the Planning Advisory Service to review its arrangements for its three separate Planning Committee's. The review is part of an ongoing programme of work designed to deliver an efficient, accountable and effective shared planning service in line with the objectives of the respective Councils Business Plans.
7. At its meeting in February, when changes to the scheme of delegation were considered, members of the Committee resolved that the terms of reference and scope of the review be reported to the Planning Committee for comment, prior to the scope of the review being finalised.
8. Appended to this report is the current draft scope for the review, received from PAS upon which members input is sought. Given the need to "recruit" and programme the review (as set out in the appended document) and members aspirations for prompt feedback to SCDC on specific arrangements around "call in" provisions especially, officers have instructed PAS to begin the process of preparing for the review subject to agreement of a final scope following the Planning Committee meeting.

Options

9. Options available include:
 - a) Not undertaking the review of SCDC Planning Committees with PAS. This would mean that opportunities for external challenge would be dependent upon feedback through the consultation process only, without the input from independent Peers. A new procurement exercise would also be required to appoint an alternative "commercial" consultant to support the work. Or;
 - b) Revising the scope of the review to focus upon a narrower number of issues. This would not realise potential opportunities to improve systems and processes across for all of the shared service committees consistent with the objectives of the service and the recent and ongoing investment in process reviews designed to improve the quality of users experience. Or;
 - c) Undertaking an internal officer review of the Planning Committee arrangements- with no external challenge. Whilst cheaper than the recommended action, the review would not benefit from external challenge and feedback provided by the Peers from PAS and would also divert existing officer resources away from other priority activities within the service.

Implications

10. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Legal

11. The recommendations from the PAS review may require future revisions to the Councils procedures. These will need to be explored through the review process, and as part of any recommendations to be considered by the Councils.

Finance

12. The cost of the PAS review as currently defined can be met from the Shared Planning Service's existing budget. Any material change to the scope of the project may result in greater/lesser cost.

Background Papers

Planning Committee report 12 February 2020 Scheme of Delegation

Appendix 1: Proposed Scope of Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service Review

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