



Proposal letter sent via e-mail

28th February 2020

Dear Chris,

PAS Review of Planning Committee's at Greater Cambridge

Context

Greater Cambridge includes a shared planning service between Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. As part of this service there are three separate planning committees, one for each Authority and a Joint Development Control Committee - Cambridge Fringes that has members on it from both Authorities and Cambridgeshire County Council.

Greater Cambridge (the council) has asked the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to prepare a proposal for a review of the three planning committees.

For the South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City Planning Committees, the review would consider whether the current structure, scheme of delegation and processes are efficient and effective and whether they meet the needs (current and future) of the Council and its customers.

For the Joint Development Control Committee, the review will undertake a visit to a Planning Committee and a 'light touch' of the current structure and scheme of delegation.

The review will also consider how decision making might be improved whilst allowing for democratic input into the process, the relationships between officers and members, and will identify where any inconsistencies exist between the Committee's. An aim of the review is to deliver recommendations on how the council could further the alignment of the committee structures and processes to make them more efficient and consistent.

How PAS delivers committee reviews

PAS uses its extensive network of peers to deliver its committee reviews. Reviews are ordinarily delivered by an officer peer/consultant and a councillor peer with experience of planning applications and committees. For this piece of work, it is worth exploring whether a larger team would be better to deliver the review, and this is set out as an option below. The peers will review the aspects of the committee agreed with the council (see 'proposal/scope' below), and, based on their own experience and knowledge of good practice, report back on these aspects and make recommendations for improvement. They would also acknowledge where good practice is already happening.

Proposal/scope

Rather than deliver a 'black box', PAS works to make sure that the review covers the right things for the council. PAS suggests reviewing the following for each Committee:

Purpose

- The committee's understanding of its purpose (what it is there for).
- Scheme of delegation, process of call-ins, focus and use of resources.

Format and process

- Debate and voting.
- Membership, size of the committee, use of substitutes.
- Room layout and facilities.
- Standard of, clarity and layout of committee reports.
- Presentation of committee reports by planning officers.
- Site visits, record-keeping, reporting.

The customer experience

- How public engagement is managed.
- Information available to aid public understanding.

Roles and responsibilities

- Role of committee members and the relationship of planning committee to other advisory groups.
- The role at planning committee of the portfolio holder.
- Support from officers (planners, legal, committee services, and other expertise) and their relationship with Members

Quality and improvement

- Member training – frequency, in-house, external
- Monitoring and review – how does the committee know it is doing a good job?

Outside of the normal planning committee review process, the review would include work to compare the two area Planning Committee's alongside the Joint Development Control Committee - Cambridge Fringes. The report will offer recommendations for greater alignment and synergy in the structure and process of these committees.

At our meeting on the 10th January we discussed a potential training session for Members in June 2020. We will be able to help set this up though we would likely tender this out to external consultants who provide dedicated Member training. Alternatively, we can offer some suggestions of consultants for you to set up the training to your own brief especially as you have a specific date in mind.

The review process

The peers will:

- Review existing materials and compare against their own experience and good practice.
- Attend, as observers, at least two of the planning committees or three if that option is selected.
- Interview a sample of committee members (including Chair and 3 others) and attending officers (Head of DM, legal officer or democratic services officer, one presenting planner)
- Run some short focus groups with Parish Councils, Agents, Developers etc.
- Write a concise report responding to the points agreed in the scope, including references to good practice from elsewhere where possible, and recommendations.

Options for Review

In order to undertake the above the following time would be required **per** Authority Committee in order to review it fully:

- One day per Officer and Member Peer to view each Committee.
- One day per Officer and Member Peer to undertake the review of materials related to the Committee e.g. delegation, call in procedure and officer reports.
- One day per Officer and Member Peer to complete the relevant interviews of Officers and Members of the Council.
- Up to six days for the Officer Peer to fully scope and write a single report for the three Planning Committee's with recommendations.

It has been agreed that a lighter touch for the JDCC is required which has been set as one day for each Officer and Member Peer.

Working with Planning Advisory Service

PAS will manage the overall project and in agreement with you select the councillor peer(s). PAS likes to work closely with councils and the key things we would expect from you are: -

- Select the councillor peer(s) – PAS will offer a selection of available councillor peers for the council to choose from. PAS requires the council to indicate if they have a preference for the political background of the councillor peer.
- To supply any key documents and information to help the team prepare.
- To provide facilities for interviews.
- To assist in managing the availability of interviewees.
- Review and feedback on draft and final reports.

Timing

It typically takes between 4-6 weeks to get the PAS team selected and in place (the most time is taken up securing the availability of councillor peers). Due to the nature of this review involving three separate planning committee's that meet on separate weeks it might take a little longer to get the team pulled together.

Following discussion between PAS and the Council we have agreed that the following dates for Planning Committee visits will be aimed for:

- **South Cambridgeshire – 8th April (with option of May 13th)**
- **Cambridge City – 1st July**
- **JDCC – 15th April (with option of 24th June)**

At this point assuming the above dates are met for committee visits it would be an aim for the review to be fully concluded by the end of August.

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Sworowski

Principal Consultant, Planning Advisory Service