

Minutes

Governance and Audit Scrutiny Committee 30th May 2022 at 4.00pm



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P Euesden (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	T Walsh	Apologies
D Hume	Apologies	Mrs L Walters	No
D Mann	Yes	D White	No
S Rehman	Yes	J Wrench (Chairman)	No
Miss V Santomauro	No		

In attendance:

Emma Goodings	Head of Planning and Economic Growth
Jessica Mann	Governance and Members Officer
Christopher Paggi	Planning Development Manager
Emma Wisbey	Governance and Members Manager

8 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

9 **MINUTES**

INFORMATION: The Minutes from the meeting of the Governance and Audit Scrutiny Committee which took place on 21st April 2022 would be approved at the next meeting of the Committee on 21st July 2022.

10 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

11 **PROPOSAL FOR PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBER'S FORUM**

INFORMATION: Members gave consideration to a report which set out the proposals for the Planning Committee Members Forum. Mr C Paggi, Planning Development Manager, was invited to introduce the report.

Members were provided with a brief update on the discussion that was held with the Developing Democracy Group (DDG) at their meeting on 27th May 2022. Discussions had also taken place previously between Councillor Mrs G Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure, Mr Paggi and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee respectively on the proposals. It was acknowledged that the

introduction of the Members Forum represented a notable change in how the Council liaised with developers; however, the results were expected to be largely positive. It was added that should the Members Forum proposals be approved, training opportunities would be made available for Members of the Planning Committee. It was also stressed that the Members Forum would not act as a decision making mechanism; instead, the Forum would provide both Members and developers alike with the opportunity to raise any queries in respect of specific applications prior to their presentation at Planning Committee. Furthermore, where applications were scheduled to be presented at Committee, it was intended that invitations would be extended to the relevant Ward Members and Parish Councils where applicable.

In response to some concerns that had been raised previously by Members about the frequency of the Members Forum meetings, Councillor Mrs Spray advised that the intention was for these meetings to take place once every three weeks, thus coinciding with meetings of the Planning Committee.

There followed a general discussion on the report; during the discussion, Members highlighted that the Council was unable to compel applicants to be involved in the Members' Forum process, and there needed to be a clear distinction for Members in terms of their approach to questions raised at the Forum and at meetings of the Planning Committee respectively. Members agreed that the training sessions referred to on the Forum would be useful in this respect.

Following a concern which was raised about the expectations of Members in attending meetings of the Forum and issues of bias, the training that was to be provided would make clear to Members that the Forum was not intended to act as a negotiation between parties, but a consultative setting where specific applications could be reviewed and questions raised for the purposes of clarification. Additional officers would likely be in attendance during the first few meetings of the Forum in order to provide further support, especially for those Members who were less familiar with the planning process. On the subject of developers, officers would also be on hand to help manage their expectations in respect of planning applications discussed at the Members Forum. It was added that in advance of Members Forum meetings, briefing notes would be prepared by officers and circulated to all Members who were due to be in attendance; the intention was that the briefing notes would set out the Council's position on the application at hand (e.g. around the Local Plan).

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor P Euesden, thanked officers for their points of clarification and welcomed any training opportunities for Members, and for Town and Parish Councils, which could help enhance their understanding of the process around Planning Committee and the Members Forum. Further to a comment made in respect of developers and their attendance at the Forum, Mr Paggi explained that although officers could not compel developers to attend, the Forum process would be in line with current pre-application advice and guidance.

Mrs E Wisbey, Governance and Members Manager, advised Members of a query that was raised at the meeting of the DDG which regarded the special responsibility allowance which Members of the Planning Committee were entitled to due to the frequency with which the Committee met. Currently, there were no such plans to review Member allowances in light of the Members Forum; however, the impacts on the Committee would be monitored and a review of the scheme would be initiated if it was felt this would be appropriate. Any such changes proposed to the allowance scheme would need to be evidence based and subject to the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) process, of

which would not take place until after the May 2023 Election.

In respect of the consultation process for the proposals around the Members Forum, it was confirmed that, subject to the feedback at Committee, Parish and Town Councils would be consulted in June. Further to a query that was raised at the recent meeting of the DDG, Members were advised that consideration was being given as to whether the dates for the consultation could be brought forward. Once the consultation process had concluded, it was intended that the Members Forum report would be presented at the meeting of Full Council in July.

DECISION: Members gave consideration to the proposals for a Planning Members Forum and made any suggestions for how the proposals could be improved to ensure they were fit for purpose.

REASON FOR DECISION: Full Council approved a new Scheme of Delegation for Development Management decision-making on 7th December 2020. Part of the proposals included the introduction of a new 'Members Forum' where applicants and agents would have the ability during the pre-application, pre-submission, and application stage of the planning process, to present their proposals to Members of the Planning Committee. This report brings forward the Terms of Reference of the Member Forum for consideration.

The meeting commenced at 4.00pm and closed at 4.41pm

Councillor P Euesden
(Vice-Chairman in the Chair)