

Runnymede Borough Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

4 April 2019 at 8.17 pm.

Members of the Committee present: Councillors M J Maddox (Chairman), S L Dennett, Mrs L M Gillham, T J F E Gracey, N M King, Mrs Y P Lay and P S Sohi

Member of the Committee absent: Councillors S M Mackay and P J Taylor

580 FIRE PRECAUTIONS

The Chairman read out the Fire Precautions.

581 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 February 2019 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

582 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor P J Taylor (Vice- Chairman).

583 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S PLANNING SERVICE – UPDATE

As part of the Committee's Work Programme, Members had asked that the Committee conduct a review of the Planning Service. The Committee received an update on the progress of the review of the Council's Planning Service since the Committee had last met.

At its meeting on 5 July 2018, in view of the demands upon the time of Members, the Committee agreed to appoint a Planning Service Review Advisory Panel whose remit would be to conduct the core work involved in the Review which would include meeting with residents and stakeholders for the scrutiny review following the PAS Peer Challenge Review, meeting with PAS to settle the scope of their instructions, meeting with key Officers within the Council's Planning service and seeking to identify the effectiveness of the Council's Planning service in accordance with particular criteria. The Committee agreed to delegate any necessary powers and functions to the Planning Service Review Advisory Panel as were incidental to the Advisory Panel's remit. The Committee agreed that the membership of the Advisory Panel would be Councillor Taylor (Chairman), Councillor Dennett, Councillor Mrs Gillham and Councillor T Gracey.

A Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Peer Challenge Review took place between 12-14 September 2018. At its meeting on 4 October 2018, the Committee had been advised of PAS' findings and noted that a final and detailed report would be provided by PAS to the Council in due course. PAS' final report dated 8 February 2019 could be found on the Council's website under the heading of "Planning Service Review – update". The PAS review gave both the public and elected Members an independent view of how the Council's Planning Service was helping to deliver the Council's objectives.

The next stage of the Planning Service review was to gather evidence on the work of the Planning service and its interaction and communication with Members and customers. The Advisory Panel had received written and verbal representations from local residents in respect of the service's interaction and communication with Members and customers at its meeting held on the evening of 12 March 2019. The Committee noted a note of this

meeting and Members reported that a number of positive matters for further consideration by the Panel had emerged from this meeting.

The Panel now intended to seek evidence from the Planning Committee and from the Planning Service, both of whom would be invited to provide their comments prior to the Panel finalising its recommendations by way of a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee. The evidence the Panel would seek would be based upon the PAS report and the evidence collated further to the meeting on 12 March.

The decision of both the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee and the Chairman of the Advisory Panel (in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive) was that the evidence referred to above would be sought in the new Municipal Year (i.e. after the May elections and once a new Planning Committee had been constituted). In reaching this decision, the Members concerned were mindful of the currently listed Committee meetings and the work ahead and which included stage 3 hearings in respect of the Runnymede Local Plan which were scheduled for July 2019, work associated with various planning inquiries and a restructuring of the planning functions in the Council as part of the replacement of the current departmental structure with 11 Business Units and associated Business Heads.

In view of the above, it was likely that the final report of the Panel on the Planning service review would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee in the summer of 2019. To ensure that the current Members of the Advisory Panel remained in place, (including any Members who were not standing for election to the Council in May 2019 or who were not re-elected at that election) until the report was delivered, it was proposed to preserve the current position in terms of Panel membership, remit, powers and functions into the new Municipal Year, whatever occurred at the May election.

The Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to retain the arrangements for the Advisory Panel into the new Municipal Year so that the Panel could complete its work with the same membership. It was suggested that the Committee should monitor activation of any final recommendations emerging from the review.

Some Members suggested that planning training provided to Councillors should include more advice from Officers on how to formulate motions at the Planning Committee with reasons for refusing an application where the Officer recommendation was to grant the application. Some Members reported that Officers at other local authorities (e.g. Surrey County Council and Croydon Borough Council) quoted planning policies that were appropriate when Members of those Committees wished to formulate a resolution to refuse an application and where the Officer recommendation had been to grant the application. It was also noted that Members should be mindful always of the need to avoid any predetermination in considering applications.

The Committee noted that there was no fixed way in which reasons for refusal of an application at a Planning Committee should be formulated where the Officer recommendation was to grant the application and that it was a matter for each local authority to decide how its Members and Officers should interact in reaching a decision in those circumstances. A Member suggested that, particularly in the case of applications that were of a large size and/or controversial, it might sometimes be an option for the Planning Committee to adjourn where Members wished to refuse an application but were not clear on an appropriate list of reasons for the refusal. During the adjournment, a cogent series of reasons could be drawn up by Members in consultation with Officers attending the meeting. When the meeting reconvened it could then pass an appropriate resolution.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the Planning Service Review Advisory Panel, its membership and its remit continue beyond this Municipal Year into the Municipal Year 2019/20;**
- ii) any necessary powers and functions be delegated to the Planning Service Review Advisory Panel as are incidental to the Advisory Panel's remit; and;**
- iii) the Chief Executive be delegated the authority to co-opt any current members of the Panel onto the Committee for the purpose of maintaining the Panel's membership should they not stand in the forthcoming election or not be returned in May.**

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.42 p.m.)