

CABINET	AGENDA ITEM No. 5.2
11 JUNE 2007	PUBLIC REPORT

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SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S
<p>1. That Cabinet considers the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations following the Scrutiny Review as listed in item 4.4 of this report and approves the responses in each case and endorses the 'whole system' approach to performance improvement set out at 4.5.</p>

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Cabinet following the scrutiny review of public perception of public involvement in the planning process.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to enable the Cabinet to consider the outcomes and recommendations of a recent scrutiny review of public perception of public involvement in the planning process.
- 2.2 This report is for the Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3.2.10 'to commission reviews by and determine any changes proposed by the Scrutiny Committee making recommendations to Council about proposed changes to the Council's major policy and budget framework'.

3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO
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4. SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

- 4.1 At its meeting on 25th July 2005, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Review Group to examine whether the general public felt its voice was heard during the planning process and whether any changes to the process should be put forward. The members of the review group were Councillor Wilkinson, Councillor Bartlett and Councillor Sandford.
- 4.2 Scrutiny Committee considered its final report at its meeting on 23 April 2007, where it was agreed to submit the report to the Executive.
- 4.3 The report of the Scrutiny Committee is attached at Appendix 1.

4.4 Summary of recommendations

The Planning Services in Peterborough have improved significantly over the last two years as evidenced by performance against national performance targets. The service does, however, face new challenges arising from the city's growth targets. As such, it has recently embarked upon a major initiative to improve stakeholder involvement in, and quality of, planning decisions. This initiative will address many of the Scrutiny Committees

recommendations. The recommendations made following the review are set out below. Officers have also considered the recommendations and have provided suggestions as to how Cabinet might respond in each case.

Recommendation 1

Cabinet to support that the electronic planning system becomes an ICT priority and that any obstacles to this are identified and removed.

Head of Planning Services to put in place a programme of improvement to specifically address customer service.

Consultees of planning applications should be advised as a matter of course on the outcome of each stage of the application, including being notified of any conditions attached to an application. Further investigations as to the resource implications of carrying out this action should be undertaken.

Recommendation 2

There should be a more flexible approach in the recruitment and retention of high calibre senior planning officers. Head of HR and Head of Planning Services to investigate ways of achieving this and to investigate the urgent need to improve skills within the planning department to ensure that the appropriate skills are in place to meet the needs of the future growth of the city.

Staffing levels in the planning department to be reviewed.

HR to investigate putting in place a technical framework to assess the technical skills of all applicants applying for positions within the planning department.

Recommendation 3

Undertake a review of Development Control and Enforcement and look at more effective ways of them working in parallel to make them more effective and efficient.

To provide more resources for the Enforcement Team.

To provide a scheme of prioritisation of enforcement activities to enable more proactive work.

Cabinet response to Recommendations 1, 2 and 3:

As part of a 'whole systems approach' to service improvement outlined in para 4.5, Cabinet instructs the improvement team:

- to continue to develop an Electronic Document Retrieval and Management System (EDRMS) to facilitate future performance and customer service improvements
- to develop, launch and implement a major programme focussing on improving the customer service to service users by the end of July 2007
- to review the resource implications of keeping consultees advised throughout the planning process following implementation of EDRMS.
- to continue to work closely with the Head of Human Resources to ensure that planning recruitment campaigns are as successful as possible and to develop a training programme based on a Division-wide skills assessment.

- to review staffing levels in the Division as part of the budget development process for the 2008/09 to 2010/11 Medium Term Financial Strategy.

And to note that Cabinet approved planning enforcement priorities in 2004.

Recommendation 4

All references to planning policies in planning reports and on public notices should be made in plain English.

That when a policy is quoted in any planning reports it should be explained in full within the report and not just the reference given.

Cabinet response to Recommendation 4:

Cabinet asks the Head of Planning Delivery Services to ensure that plain English is a priority in all aspects of planning reports and correspondence whilst recognising the need for clarity and legal accuracy in such work.

Recommendation 5

To ensure that 'Planning Aid' is publicised as widely as possible.

Cabinet response to Recommendation 5:

Cabinet endorses this recommendation.

Recommendation 6

That a further review is undertaken by the Community Development Scrutiny Panel to investigate the identification or creation of alternative bodies to represent those people not represented by a Parish Council.

Cabinet response to Recommendation 6:

Cabinet endorses this recommendation.

Recommendation 7

The Head of Planning Services, Chair of Planning Committee and Group Representatives to review the committee procedure to make it more user friendly, less intimidating and to take into account public opinion, including a review of the public speaking scheme.

When the Planning and Environmental Protection Committee consider any planning application they should not make substantive changes to that application at the committee meeting; it should either be approved, deferred or refused on the basis of the original application.

Cabinet response to Recommendation 7:

Cabinet asks the Head of Planning Services, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Chair of Planning Committee and Group Representatives to review the committee procedure on a regular basis to make it as accessible and as efficient as possible to all those attending. The first review will take place during the review of the Constitution, within the next six months. Cabinet notes that Planning and Environmental Protection Committee cannot make changes to any application considered by it.

4.5 Cabinet welcomes the scrutiny review and notes the significant progress already made in improving performance in the planning service. As the city grows the planning service will be critical to the success of the Council and its partners in ensuring that growth is both sustainable and appropriate. In order to 'gear up' for growth, the Council needs to ensure that all its services that support and regulate growth rise to the challenge. In particular the interaction between planning, highways and transportation and the legal service is critical to smooth, effective and accessible decision-making. In responding to this important review, the Cabinet wants to adopt a 'whole systems' approach to service improvement and is proposing:

- (i) To supplement the recommendations of this review by allocating resources from the Business Transformation Team to support performance improvement and efficiency across the whole planning process, including the interaction with Highways and Transportation and Legal Services.
- (ii) To form a planning improvement team.
- (iii) To launch a major initiative focussed on the customers of the service to include 'account management' and improved lines of communication.
- (iv) To ensure that this important staff group are supported to play their full role in delivering the growth of the city.

4.6 The improvement process will begin immediately and regular reports will be made to Cabinet, Planning Committee and the relevant programme board.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 Consultation with the following Committees, Officers and Members has taken place:

- Planning and Environmental Protection Committee
- Environment Policy Overview Committee
- Assistant Chief Executive
- Director of Environmental and Community Services
- Head of Planning Services
- Head of HR
- Head of Strategic Finance
- Head of ICT
- Director of Strategic Resources
- Principal Lawyer
- Cabinet Member for Environment and Community Safety
- Corporate Management Team
- Senior Regulatory Committee and Appeals Officer

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

6.1 That Cabinet endorses the recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Review Group consider that the recommendations made in the report broadly reflect the views of the members of the public who contributed to this review and consider that if implemented would improve service provision and customer satisfaction regarding public involvement in the planning process.

7.2 Considering the proposed expansion of the city, the failure to address any shortcomings in the planning system could result in increased levels of customer dissatisfaction and alienation from the planning process.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Legal

Following reference to and consideration by Cabinet of this matter, should any changes be necessary to the Council's constitution arising from the review process, then Cabinet would need to refer constitutional changes to a meeting of full Council. In recommending these changes, there may be resource implications but these would need to be considered by Cabinet as part of its considerations.

8.2 Financial

The Review Group were charged with commenting on public perception of public involvement in the planning process, it was not in their remit to look into possible cost implementations, but if Cabinet agree the recommendations they can ask for detailed costings to be examined. It is likely that there would be financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 No alternative options were considered as these recommendations are the result of the scrutiny review, which has recently been undertaken, and have been agreed by the Scrutiny Committee.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

All responses to the public consultation are held with the Scrutiny team.

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 18 September 2006, 30th October 2006 and 23 April 2007.

Notes of the Scrutiny Committee Group Representatives meeting held on 14th November 2006.