

**Report of:**     **Corporate Director for Environment and Regeneration**

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Ward(s)</b>
Regeneration And Employment Review Committee	12 February 2015	B1	All

<b>Delete as appropriate</b>		Non-exempt
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**SUBJECT:**   The Effectiveness Of Planning Committee Structure In Terms Of Effective Decision Making And Public Participation Report Back

## **1.   Synopsis**

- 1.1   This reports updates members on progress on the recommendations of the November 2013 Regeneration and Employment Review Committee report on “the effectiveness of the planning committee structure in terms of effective decision making and public participation”
- 1.2   The review ran from January 2011 until April 2013 and evidence was received from the following sources:
  1.     Presentations from Councillors - Councillor Khan, Chair of the Planning Committee; Councillor Klute, Chair of Planning Sub-Committee B; Councillor Convery, the Executive member responsible for Planning.
  2.     Presentations from council officers – Jan Hart, Service Director, Public Protection; Kevin Henson, Team Manager, Major Applications; Karen Sullivan, Service Director Planning and Development.
- 1.3   The final report was presented to the Regeneration And Employment Review Committee in November 2013 and a number of recommendations were made. These are outlined below.

## **2.   Recommendations**

- 2.1   1.That following the introduction of the new Planning and Development Service IT system, the council provides more information, including photographs, in relation to specific planning applications on the website.

2. There was a robust, up to date, evidence based development plan to support decision making. This includes the Core Strategy 2011, Site Allocations Document, Development Management policies and Finsbury Local Plan June 2013. These will be periodically reviewed and assessments made in respect of new policies bedding in.

3. That there be continued use of the committee template which was recently reviewed. This is now standardised across all three committees. This ensures a consistency in report writing and is simpler for members and the public to deal with a single format and layout.

4. That the planning service continues to email ward members about applications in their wards and that work be undertaken to improve the information given to ward members through the link emailed to them about planning applications in their ward.

5. That a link be placed from the Planning webpages to the meeting agendas to enable members of the public to find planning agendas more easily.

6. That the Chair of Planning meetings in the Council Chamber be requested to ensure that officers, members and members of the public use their microphones when speaking and that there be an examination whether the public address system could be improved in those rooms where Planning Committee Meetings take place.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Prior to May 2010 an area based planning system had been operating at Islington Council. Each of the four areas in Islington – North, South, East and West had an Area Planning Sub - Committee which consisted of six members of the overarching area committee. Each Area Planning Sub-Committee decided upon the planning applications within their area.
- 3.2 In May 2010 the Council decided to adopt a centralised planning system. This involved setting up a planning committee, which consisted of ten members, to consider major applications in the borough. Two planning sub-committees, which each consisted of five members, were set up to consider the minor applications and these members were taken from the main committee.
- 3.3 The committee decided to conduct a review into the new planning system to consider:
- the effectiveness of decision making; public participation; the impact of committee decisions on appeals and legal challenges (judicial review); the Committee process in the light of the emerging Localism Bill and other legislative changes proposed for 2011, including proposed local fee setting and the committee process in terms of resource and cost implications.
- 3.4 A series of evidence gathering occurred and this was presented to the committee by Jan Hart in February 2011. In April 2011 a presentation was made by Kevin Henson to the panel and in October 2011 the then Executive Member Cllr Convery and the Chair of Sub-Committee B Cllr Klute attended the committee to give evidence. Karen Sullivan, Service Director also gave evidence. On October 2013 Victoria Geoghegan, Head of Service presented the results of the questionnaire that had been undertaken at committee on the 5 September 2013.
- 3.5 The review concluded that the implementation of the centralised planning structure had been effective in terms of decision making and that the review had been helpful in reviewing the operation of planning committee and the effectiveness of the new structure. There was still more work to be done within the Planning Service to ensure the system operated as effectively as possible.

### **4. Implications**

- 4.1 **Financial implications:**  
The report on the progress on the recommendations set out in Appendix A does not have any financial implications.
- 4.2 **Legal Implications:**

The report on the progress on the recommendations as set out in Appendix A does not have any specific legal implications.

**4.3 Environmental Implications:**

The report on the progress on the recommendations set out in Appendix A does not have any environmental implications.

**4.4 Resident Impact Assessment:**

The council must eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in relation to disability, race, gender and take account of disabilities even where that involves treating the disabled person more favourably than others (section 49a Disability Discrimination Act, 1995; section 71 Race Relations Act 1976; Section 76b and c Sex Discrimination Act 1975).

The likely positive impacts of the effectiveness of Planning Committee structure are:

- Easy to follow and standard formatted, plain english report writing
- Up to date local development plan to support decision making and secure benefits for all residents in the borough – for example the delivery of sustainable developments in the borough including affordable housing, employment opportunities and sustainable energy through the built form
- Access to committee reports on the website

## **5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

- 5.1 The Scrutiny has ensured positive change in service delivery, contributing to a more successful planning committee structure in terms of decision making and public participation

### **Appendices**

**Background papers:** (available online or on request):

- Report of Regeneration And Employment Review Committee: Planning Committee Structure November 2013

Final report clearance:

**Signed by:**

Director for Joint Board/Committees or Exec      Date  
Member if going to the Executive

**Received by:**

Head of Democratic Services      Date

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## **APPENDIX A: THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROGRESS**

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

That following the introduction of the new Planning and Development Service IT system, the council provides more information, including photographs, in relation to specific planning applications on the website.

**PROGRESS** – The committee agendas include appropriate photographs and plans that support the assessment. A PowerPoint presentation is undertaken for every committee item and this includes relevant photographs and plans in respect of the proposed development. This has led to clearer reporting both in terms of the committee report and the presentation at the committee. This has proved positive for members and the public in attendance in ensuring they have a proper understanding of the development and its impact before a decision is made. The council's planning website includes all documents, plans and supporting information submitted with the application and this is available 24/7 to all the public and members alike.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

There was a robust, up to date, evidence based development plan to support decision making. This includes the Core Strategy 2011, Site Allocations Document, Development Management policies and Finsbury Local Plan June 2013. These will be periodically reviewed and assessments made in respect of new policies bedding in.

**PROGRESS** – The up to date local development plan has proven extremely beneficial to consistent decision making. As a consequence of ensuring all guidance is up to date and responsive the Service has recently embarked on a review of the Islington Urban Design Guidance which is instrumental to decision making in the borough. Furthermore, the preliminary work for an SPD on basements is also being prepared to respond to recent development pressures.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

That there be continued use of the committee template which was recently reviewed. This is now standardised across all three committees. This ensures a consistency in report writing and is simpler for members and the public to deal with a single format and layout.

**PROGRESS** – This is working well. A standard template ensures ease of use for members and a standard reporting mechanism for officers. The consistent approach to reports ensures that all key issues are addressed in a clear, comprehensive and logical manner. This has been positive. The report template is often reviewed and updated when necessary – for example we have recently standardised how we report day/sunlight information in major committee reports which has given more clarity of understanding around the issue.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

That the planning service continues to email ward members about applications in their wards and that work be undertaken to improve the information given to ward members through the link emailed to them about planning applications in their ward.

**PROGRESS** - This is being done and weekly lists are emailed every week. The problems with IT and how the information appears on hand held machine has been resolved.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

That a link be placed from the Planning webpages to the meeting agendas to enable members of the public to find planning agendas more easily.

**PROGRESS** – A link to the agendas has been added to the planning webpages which links directly to the democracy pages and the committee agendas. This can be found on the planning application search page. Furthermore, Development Management is currently in the process of updating and improving the information on its website. As part of those improvements the link will still be included on the planning search page to the committee agenda pages to ensure the agendas are easily accessible to the public.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

That the Chair of Planning meetings in the Council Chamber be requested to ensure that officers, members and members of the public use their microphones when speaking and that there be an examination whether the public address system could be improved in those rooms where Planning Committee Meetings take place.

**PROGRESS** – At each meeting officers, members and the public are reminded to make any address through the microphone and to switch off after use. The committee and presenting officers are arranged in such a manner that they face the chamber and do not turn their backs to the public. This assists in both audible presentations and during question and answer sessions.

The overall quality of the public address system was investigated by committee services at the time of the November 2013 report. It was concluded that the system whilst not perfect was working effectively and that the main issue was people not turning their microphones on. There have been no recent complaints at the committee meetings and the chairs are very good at reminding people to use the microphones.

VFG - November 2014