

Report to Area Plans Sub-Committee South

Date of meeting: 31 May 2017



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Subject: Area Plans Sub-Committees – Public Seating Arrangements

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That members consider and agree appropriate arrangements for public seating for all future meetings of the Sub-Committee.

1. Members will be aware that a disturbance occurred amongst members of the public at the meeting of Area Plans Sub-Committee West on 19 October 2016.
2. The Council takes its responsibilities for the safety of its elected members very seriously and, following representations subsequently received from a number of members of Area Plans Sub-Committee West in response to the incident, Management Board proposed that the following changes be made to the existing operational arrangements for meetings of Area Plans Sub-Committee West, Area Plans Sub-Committee East and the District Development Management Committee:
 - (a) members of the Sub-Committee/District Development Management Committee to be seated on the opposite side of the Council Chamber from the current seating layout, so that they are able to vacate the meeting through the ante-room in the event of disturbance, without the need to cross the Chamber and pass by any 'troublesome' members of the audience; and
 - (b) only registered speakers to be allowed to sit in the Council Chamber itself. All other members of the public to be directed to the Public Gallery on the second floor (Democratic Services Officers to exercise discretion in this regard where a speaker needs to be accompanied by a (non-speaking) partner or spouse etc.).
3. The views of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairman of Area Plans Sub-Committee West, Area Plans Sub-Committee East and the District Development Management Committee, were sought in connection with the proposed changes to the existing operational arrangements for meetings of these committees. No concern in this respect was raised by any member consulted on the proposed arrangements. The implementation of the new arrangements was therefore publicised in the Council Bulletin on 4 November 2016 and implemented with effect from the meeting of Area Plans Sub-Committee East on 9 November 2016.
4. Whilst these arrangements did not originally apply to Area Plans Sub-Committee South, they are now relevant as a result of the venue for meetings of the Sub-Committee having transferred Civic Offices from the current municipal year.
5. Since the implementation of these new public seating arrangements, members of Area Plans Sub-Committee East have raised concerns with regard to members of the public (i.e. those not already registered as speakers on specific applications) being seated in

the Public Gallery as a matter of course. The Sub-Committee does not generally support the need for only registered speakers to be allowed to sit in the Council Chamber itself and considers that the direction of all other members of the public to the Public Gallery means that it is difficult for it to gauge public opinion on specific proposals and for the public to hear and observe the proceedings of the meeting.

6. Management Board has considered the differing views of Area Plans Sub-Committee East in regard to the segregation of members of the public (non-registered speakers) to the Public Gallery and suggested that a way forward in this respect should be considered by the joint meeting of Development Management Chairman and Vice-Chairman.
7. At their meeting on 20 April 2017, the Development Management Chairman and Vice-Chairman agreed that each of the three Area Plans Sub-Committees should individually consider and determine arrangements for public seating at this first meeting of the municipal year. The Sub-Committee is therefore requested to consider and agree its own arrangements for public seating for all future meetings.
8. The joint meeting of Development Management Chairman and Vice-Chairman has also requested that investigation be made of the possibility of a visible 'security' presence being provided in the Council Chamber for all meetings of the Area Plans Sub-Committees and the District Development Management Committee, in order to ensure the safety of members and officers. The views of the joint meeting in this regard will be considered by the Governance Select Committee in due course.