

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF GOVERNANCE SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2016
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.15 - 8.25 PM**

Members Present: T Church (Chairman), Y Knight (Vice-Chairman), D Dorrell, L Hughes, S Jones, H Kauffman, S Watson, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley

Other members present: J Philip and J H Whitehouse

Apologies for Absence: M McEwen and B Sandler

Officers Present N Richardson (Assistant Director (Development Management)), B Copson (Senior Performance Improvement Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Officer)

26. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

There were no substitute members for the meeting.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

28. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the select committee held on 1 December 2015 be agreed.

29. TERMS OF REFERENCE/WORK PROGRAMME

The select committee noted its Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

30. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2015/16 - QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING (QUARTER 3)

The Select Committee received a report regarding the Key Performance Indicators 2015/16 – Quarterly Performance Monitoring (Quarter 3) from the Performance Improvement Officer.

A range of 36 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2015/16 was adopted by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee in March 2015. They were important to the improvement of the Council's services and comprised a combination of some former statutory indicators and locally determined performance measures. The KPIs directed improvement effort towards services and national priorities and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the district.

Members were advised that overall performance in the area regarding the timely process of planning applications was good. However the percentage of planning applications recommended by officers for refusal being overturned and granted permission following an appeal was higher this quarter. The target of 19.0% was breached by reaching 33.3% in Quarter 3. By contrast the target for Councillors refusing planning applications against officer recommendation was better, 50% being the target upper limit and Members reached 41.2%.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made on the Key Performance Indicators 2015/16 – Quarterly Performance Monitoring (Quarter 3) be noted.

31. DATA QUALITY STRATEGY 2016/17 - 2018/19

The Select Committee received a report from the Performance Improvement Officer regarding the Data Quality Strategy 2016/17 – 2018/19.

The Council needed timely, accurate and reliable data to manage activities and meet internal and external requirements for demonstrating accountability through accurate reporting. Data was used for the assessment of the Council's performance, the strategy set out the arrangements for the next 3 years to ensure that key data met the highest standards. Members noted that the strategy had previously been considered by the Corporate Governance Group in November 2015 and by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee in January 2016.

RESOLVED:

That the Data Quality Strategy 2016/17 – 2018/19 be noted.

32. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR'S MEETING - 27 OCTOBER 2015

The Select Committee perused the minutes from the most recent Development Management Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen's meeting held on 27 October 2015.

Member's attention focussed on Minute Item 6 which concerned the Review of Current and Future Training Needs. Members supported using training, particularly for parish and town councils, to reduce the number of call-ins of planning applications to the area planning sub-committees, better knowledge and understanding of planning considerations would make for better recommendations. It was also felt that regular and smaller "bitesize" training sessions for members would be beneficial as the details were easier to digest.

Members expressed concern with the consultation comments that were received from Essex County Council Highways on planning applications submitted to committees. They requested that Essex Highways' officers should be invited to this select committee to discuss these issues and it was agreed that this should be added to next year's select committee draft work programme.

There was a strong feeling that the District Council was stranded in a situation whereby the county council did not object or make adequate representations on planning applications and thus weakened planning committees' decisions, particularly when appeals took place. The Assistant Director (Development Management) assured the select committee that Highways' officers visited the Civic

Offices regularly and wrote short summaries on current planning applications. However they were not always aware of local objections to these applications many of which were on highways grounds.

A further concern was basement expansions which was having a particular effect on planning considerations in central London. Officers agreed to draft an item regarding this issue for the Council Bulletin.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the minutes from the Development Management Chair and Vice Chair's Meeting held on 27 October 2015 be noted; and
- (2) That an item be added to the draft work programme for 2016/17 regarding an invitation to Essex County Council Highways to attend a meeting for discussing on-going concerns with planning application consultations; and
- (3) That an item be published in the Council Bulletin advising on the current situation in regard to basement developments.

33. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

The Select Committee received a report regarding Pre-Planning Application Advice from the Assistant Director (Development Management).

The Local Government Act 2003 allowed local authorities to charge customers for holding discussions prior to the submission of planning applications. This Council had been charging on major category applications since 2007 and had expanded this across other developments including householder extensions. Unlike planning application fees, pre-application advice was set locally, with discussions having always been encouraged as a charging scheme had the benefit of dissuading some ill conceived proposals and highlighted the cost of officer time in the process and recouping some of this cost.

The officer's report, in letter form, gave an assessment of whether there seemed a reasonable chance of getting planning permission and where possible, suggested how amendments could be made as a way forward. It was advised that the number of pre-applications received and dealt with by officers had markedly increased and although this brought in a larger income to the authority, it had also added significantly to officer workload. In addition the time frame for response, set for up to 21 working days from a meeting, was rarely achieved because of the pressure for turning around planning applications in a timely manner.

Members had access to the paid pre-planning application enquiries through notification in the Council Bulletin. However currently member's involvement in the pre-paid process was quite limited, despite the Government's encouragement that effective pre-application engagement should involve elected Councillors particularly ward ones.

The Chairman drew attention to statistics within the officer's report which showed that in the first 9 months of 2015/16, the number of paid pre-application enquiries had risen from 129 the previous year to 173, however the total income had fallen from £105,000 to £83,000. The Assistant Director (Development Management) advised that each extra meeting needed raised costs for the applicant. The Chairman

suggested that there were either many smaller planning applications or less larger ones being submitted.

Members were encouraged to check where S106 monies were intended to be allocated in the Council Bulletin and Weekly Planning List. However the select committee felt that this form of communication was not always adequate in conveying news of S106 proposals, they suggested that ward members and parish clerks effected should be informed electronically.

Members thanked the Assistant Director (Development Management) for his report.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report regarding the Development Management Pre-Application Advice be noted; and
- (2) That the resource requirements for paid pre-planning application advice within Development Control be noted.

34. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the select committee would be held on Tuesday 5 April 2016 at 7.15p.m. in Committee Room 1.