
REPORT OF DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

MEETING HELD ON 18 MAY 2004

Chair: * Councillor Anne Whitehead

Councillors: * Marilyn Ashton * Idaikkadar
 * Mrs Bath * Ismail (1)
 * Bluston * Kara (2)
 * Choudhury * Mrs Joyce Nickolay
 * Janet Cowan * Thornton

* Denotes Member present
 (1) and (2) Denote category of Reserve Member

[Note: Councillors D Ashton and Mrs Kinnear also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minute 593 below].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL
PART II - MINUTES
587. Appointment of Chair:

RESOLVED: To note the appointment under the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 1.1(xii) of Councillor Anne Whitehead as Chair of the Development Control Committee for the 2004/2005 Municipal Year, as agreed at the Annual Council Meeting held on 13 May 2004.

588. Attendance by Reserve Members:

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Miles
 Councillor Knowles

Reserve Member

Councillor Ismail
 Councillor Kara

589. Appointment of a Vice-Chair:

Councillor Marilyn Ashton was nominated and seconded. No other nominations were received at this point. Upon being put to a vote, the nomination was not carried.

Subsequently, Councillor Bluston was nominated and seconded. Upon being put to a vote, it was

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Bluston as Vice-Chair of the Development Control Committee for the 2004/2005 Municipal Year.

590. Declarations of Interest:

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business to be transacted at this meeting.

591. Minutes:

RESOLVED: That the approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2004 be deferred to the next ordinary meeting of the Committee to be held at 7.30 pm that evening.

592. Right of Members to Speak:

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with Committee Procedure Rule 4.1, Councillors David Ashton and Mrs Kinnear, who were not Members of the Committee, be allowed to speak on Item 6 on the agenda (Minute 593 refers).

593. **Planning and Development Improvement Plan 2004/05 - 2006/07:**

The Committee received a report of the Chief Planning Officer and a reference from the Cabinet meeting held on 20 April 2004 regarding the Planning and Development Improvement Plan 2004/05 – 2006/07, which had been deferred from consideration at the previous meeting of the Committee held on 21 April 2004. The Chief Planning Officer explained that the Plan demonstrated how performance of the Planning and Development function could be improved and the resources required to achieve those improvements.

The Chief Planning Officer reported that the Improvement Plan also addressed the problems of heavy workload in the Forward Planning and the Building Control Services. He added that it was important to maintain the excellent reputation of the Council's Building Control Service which was considered to be one of the best in London.

He explained that the commitment and support of the Council's IT Service would be necessary in the implementation of the Plan. He drew attention to the reference from Cabinet and asked Members to agree the following additional recommendation:

“That an early report on a revised scheme of delegation be submitted to the Development Control Committee for its consideration.”

He assured Members that the concerns by Cabinet over additional training for Members in Year 3, when local government elections in London might bring in new Councillors, was being addressed.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Planning Officer stated that the improvements in IT would, when fully implemented, amongst other things,

- allow electronic displays of plans at meetings of this Committee
- help achieve an electronic application processing system, a facet which would allow members of the public to submit applications and comments electronically.

He added that £50k had been set aside for development of the system and that in the order of £100k would be required in Year 2 to achieve improvements in the system. He informed Members that officers had looked at the IT systems used by other local authorities and stated that the services of an IT consultant, who was also a specialist in the Planning field, had been engaged by Harrow.

He assured Members that the information available on the system would be the same as that currently available on the existing planning files.

In response to further questions from Members, the Chief Planning Officer reported that

- as a result of the problems in recruitment of planning staff, an allowance had been made in Year 1 for the employment of agency staff
- the amount of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) likely to be received in 2005/6 was dependent mainly on improvement in the performance of the Development Control service
- the PDG was also dependent on the progress made towards adopting the Unitary Development Plan and making progress towards the replacement Local Development Framework, and meeting e-government targets
- in comparison with other local authorities, Harrow Council's performance on deciding minor planning applications within eight weeks was poor
- the providers of our existing IT systems appeared slow in meeting the pace of change and the new challenges
- that ISO9000 recognition was important and that the Planning Service would also be seeking to achieve in due course a Charter Mark which was more customer focussed.

The Chief Planning Officer acknowledged the problems and issues around consultations and went on to explain how the new IT systems could assist by identifying the properties that ought to be consulted on.

The Chair suggested that it would be helpful for Members of the Development Control

Committee to see the IT systems in operation, and requested that this should be built into the Members' Training Plan(s).

The report was welcomed by Members. Members highlighted the need for modernisation of the relevant processes. A Member stated that delegation was an issue. Several references were made to it being inappropriate for the report to have received prior approvals from the Cabinet and for the comments of this Committee now to be made to the relevant Portfolio Holder alone. It was also suggested that the report might have been submitted to the Best Value Advisory Panel. Reservations were expressed about achieving the targets set out on page 11 of the officer report but it was felt that a partnership between Members and officers would be essential to attain those targets and to build on Harrow's good record in Planning implementation.

Following a vote, it was

RESOLVED: That (1) the report and the Improvement Plan be noted;

(2) the comments of this Committee be provided to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value, who had delegated authority from the Cabinet to take these into account;

(3) an early report on a revised scheme of delegation be submitted to the Development Control Committee for its consideration.

Reasons for Decision: (i) To allow the comments to be considered and appropriate action to be taken;

(ii) to address the identified need to review the scheme of delegation.

[Note: Councillors Marilyn Ashton, Mrs Bath, Janet Cowan, Kara and Mrs Joyce Nickolay wished to be recorded as having voted against the decision at (2) above, which decision was determined upon the exercise of the Chair's casting vote].

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 7.17 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ANNE WHITEHEAD
Chair