

Meeting:	Development Management Committee
Date:	25 March 2009
Subject:	Proposed changes to structure of Strategic Planning and Development Management Committees
Responsible Officer:	Andy Parsons, Head of Planning
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Marilyn Ashton – Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Enterprise
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix A – Terms of Reference

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out a proposal for the rationalisation of these two committees into a single committee in the interest of efficiency and effectiveness.

Recommendations:

The Development Management Committee is requested to:

1. Agree to a return to a single decision making committee for all non-delegated planning decisions.
2. Agree to the decision of this committee being referred to the next available meeting of the Full Council for ratification and for approval of any consequential and necessary amendments to the Constitution.

Reason:

To make efficient and effective use of Committee time.

Section 2 – Report

Background

- 2.1 Members will be aware that there has been a significant reduction in planning applications received by the Council as a result of the slowdown in the economy. This has resulted in a fall in numbers of major applications. As a result, the business of the Strategic Planning Committee has been significantly reduced. Moreover, whilst officers continue to be involved in a number of pre-application processes on major applications, the volume of new major applications is expected to remain, for sometime, at a substantially lower level than recent years.
- 2.2 Since May 2008, the Development Management Committee has dealt with an average of just under 18 applications at each meeting with a maximum of 22 and a minimum of 11: the committee on 21st January 2009 dealt with 15 applications and the committee on 25th February 2009 dealt with 13. The business of the committee was generally concluded within 2.5 hours.
- 2.3 Over the same period, the Strategic Management Committee has dealt with an average of just over 7 applications at each meeting. However, the numbers have been falling progressively from 12 in May 2008 to 3 in February 2009 and 1 in March 2009. The time taken to conclude the business of the meetings has similarly fallen from 5 hours in May 2008 to 1.3 hours in February 2009.

Why a change is needed

- 2.4 It is recognised that numbers of applications at the Strategic Management Committee is a fairly crude measure as it does not consider the complexity of issues involved in major applications. The Head of Planning is of the view that the business of the Strategic Management Committee could readily be combined with the business of the Development Management Committee without significantly impacting on the efficiency of that committee.
- 2.5 To ensure that Major applications of strategic importance are given significant time to be properly discussed, it is further proposed that at the request of the Chairman, a major application will be considered at a separate special meeting of the planning committee.

Consultation

- 2.6 Informal discussions have taken place with the Chairman and Nominated Member for SPC. A similar report was presented to the Strategic Planning Committee on 11 March 2009 and was agreed.

Implications if recommendations are rejected

- 2.7 Meetings could potentially be cancelled due to insufficient business, which would be unfair on public, members and officers.

Financial Implications

- 2.8 The move to two decision-making committees entailed additional costs to Planning, Legal and Committee Services that have been largely met within the respective services. The return to a single committee will lead to a reduction in costs.

Legal Implications

2.9 Contained in the body of the report.

Equalities Implications

2.10 None specific.

Risk Management Implications

2.11 With just one committee making all relevant planning decisions there is a risk of return to the problem of excessively long committees and agendas. The size and complexity of the agendas will need to be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis as well as the wider economic situation and the emerging workload of the service. Using this information will allow mitigation options such as planned additional committees to avoid excessively long agendas to be implemented.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

2.12 The more simplified route to decision-making inherent in these proposals is considered likely to have a generally beneficial effect.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Sheela Thakrar	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 10 March 2009		
Name: Jessica Farmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 11 March 2009		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Andy Parsons, Head of Planning, ext 6106

Background Papers:
Circular 15/92

Report to Development Control Committee 26th July 2006 – Agenda Item 15