

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF PROVISION OF VALUE FOR MONEY WITHIN PLANNING
SERVICES TASK AND FINISH PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2007
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 9.35 PM**

Members Present: Mrs L Wagland (Chairman), , R Bassett, M Colling, R Frankel, D Jacobs, Mrs P Richardson and H Ulkun

Other members present: Mrs A Grigg

Apologies for Absence: G Mohindra and R Morgan

Officers Present J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), R Sharp (Principal Accountant) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

7. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

None reported.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None reported.

9. NOTES OF LAST MEETING - 23 OCTOBER 2007

Noted subject to the inclusion of 'Councillor Mrs P Richardson' in the list of Members present.

10. TERMS OF REFERENCE/ WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

11. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES

At its last meeting the Panel expressed a wish to update the above Plan. The Panel received a copy of the latest version covering the period 2001 – to 2007 which was very much work in progress. The Panel considered this information and made a number of comments.

(a) Development Control - report provided a 10 year overview of performance

Costs Analysis for Development Control – Key Information Pg 21 - 24

Agreed: R Sharp to add to this revised estimates for this and next year.

Cost Estimates of Planning Services - Pg 34

This table compared the costs of this Authority against those of other Authorities. The Panel suggested that this should specify the number of application dealt with per Council.

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The Panel expressed a wish to gain further information on 1-2 Authorities within this family and also data on Authorities outside this family. The Councils should cover areas of a similar character to Epping Forest.

Agreed that further information be gained on Mid Sussex, Three Rivers and also East Herts.

It was suggested that this detail the number of planning application dealt with per Authority and their turnaround times for applications. This should also provide some background information on their Forward Planning Services. **Action:** J Preston to take this forward and report findings back to the next meeting.

J Preston reported on his attendance at meetings of the Essex Planning Officers Association. During which there was reference to benchmarking arrangements. The Panel might wish to give further consideration to these arrangements.

(b) Staffing (pg 18) Work load of officers – Panel requested more specific data on case loads per officer etc/ man hours per case. The Panel stressed the value of the inclusion of this data on the software.

(c) Procedures/IT system (pg 16). Terraquest was currently undertaking a further review of these matters. Noted the need to review impact of the new IT system.

Action: J Preston to approach IT suppliers to arrange presentation for next meeting.

Applications Fees - the Panel noted the costs to the Council of major cases and the cost of minor applications. Reference was also made to the cost of external consultants. The Panel considered the need to review this?

Councillor Frankel requested clarification of some of the phrases in the plan (Application to Income Charge pg 34). He **agreed** to reconsider the statistics and flag up any unclear phrases for submission to R Sharp for clarification.

Action: Councillor Frankel to report back to R Sharp.

(d) Further Information

In relation to Development Control, the Panel requested:

- A break down of the process from 'start to finish' – explanation of the three categories of planning applications (major, minor and other);
- Implications of a three weekly cycle for the Area Planning Sub – Committees;
- Information on the Legal Processes and Procedures?

(e) Consultation

The Panel also agreed to canvass the views of the following:

- Local Town/Parish Council – thought Local Liaisons Committee;

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- Members of the Area Planning Sub – Committees;
- Residents Associations, Amenity Groups;
- Planning Applicants, Objectors;
- Land Registry;
- Planning Agents – Panel should interview agents with experience of submitting plans to the Council/other Authorities to gain feedback.

The Panel discussed ways of carrying out the above tasks and possible questions for the surveys. It was agreed that these issues be considered further at the next meeting.

12. BMG CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Panel received a copy of the above Customer Satisfaction survey.

The Panel expressed concern about some of the statistics and requested that these concerns be put to BMG. **Action** J Preston to take this forward.

The following information has been received from BMG since the meeting:

"The Council has a large number of agents who submit many applications. Since the rules of the survey only allow us to ask about one application per person, the number of qualifying applications is relatively low. As an example, one of the agents submitted 28 applications during the period and another 20. This explains why only 262 people were consulted out of over 1000 applications."

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Beacon Council Seminar – London – 14 February 2007

The Chairman reported that the aim of the event was to consider achievements in planning services and share good practice. She advised that all Members of the Panel were welcomed to attend this conference.

Action: Councillor Mrs Wagland/Planning Services to make available information on the above conference for distribution to Members.

14. PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

The Chairman drew attention to a document on Permitted Development detailing proposed changes to the policy. (tabled)

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next meeting 21 January 2007 at 7.30 pm in CR1 – Items of business

IT system – Presentation from suppliers
Consultation (Local Members etc) – arrangements for taking this forward.