

**Report to Constitution and
Member Services Scrutiny Standing Panel
Date of Meeting: 3 July 2006**

Subject: Areas Plans Sub-Committees – Review of Structure

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Recommendations:

- (1) To note current steps to consult on the proposal to move to three Area Plans Sub-Committees;**
- (2) To consider, subject to the outcome of consultation, decisions in principle on the following aspects:**
 - (a) whether the three proposed Area Plans Sub-Committees should continue to be "local" or deal with cases from across the District;**
 - (b) to review, if appropriate, the areas to be allocated to each of the three local committees; and**
 - (c) to consider policy in respect of membership of three Area Sub-Committees.**

Introduction

1. At the last meeting, following an extensive debate, the Standing Panel agreed the principle of reducing the number of Area Plans Sub-Committees from four to three. The principal reasons for this were:

- (a) that it would allow for improvement in the Council's performance in processing planning applications against the statutory performance indicator targets;**
- (b) would allow all members of the Council to have a seat on a Plans Sub-Committee;**
- (c) would allow for workloads between Area Plans Sub-Committees to be equalised; and**
- (d) would allow rural and urban areas to be realigned in a more logical way.**

Consultation

2. Since the last meeting of the Panel, a Members' Bulletin item has been published dealing with the principle of moving to three Plans Sub-Committees and this has been coupled with further questions about the more detailed issues concerning local area status, etc. A similar questionnaire will be published on the website. The results of this consultation are attached at Appendix 1.

(a) Area - Based Sub-Committees

3. The four present Sub-Committees are deemed to be "local" committees and thereby exempt from normal pro rata requirements.

4. The conditions for "local" status are:

(a) population of not more than 40% of the District;

(b) area of not more than 40% of the District;

(c) members drawn solely from electoral wards in the area concerned; and

(d) dealing with District Council functions only.

5. 40% of the area of the District (130 square miles) is 52 square miles. 40% of the population (121,000) is 48,400.

6. Any of the three proposed Sub-Committee must meet (a) or (b) and (c) and (d). If these criteria are not met, they must have pro rata membership according to the numbers of councillors in the political groups overall.

7. A map showing areas and populations is attached at Appendix 2.

Points to Note

8. Three Area Sub-Committees will reduce the 'waiting time' for planning matters from 4 weeks to 3 weeks and help to meet Government targets.

9. Membership can be determined on a more flexible basis.

10. Three Area Sub-Committees, provided that the criteria are met, may allow a redesign of areas so that some of the concerns about rural/urban splits can be dealt with.

(b) "General" Plans Sub-Committees

11. The Council operated this system for many years. This involves the three Plans Sub-Committees no longer being linked to specific areas but would deal with planning matters for rota. They would however be subject to normal pro rata membership, councillors being appointed according to political group strengths and drawn from any ward.

Points to Note

12. Three "General" Sub-Committees might further speed up the processing of planning decisions in that applications would not have to wait for an appropriate Area Sub-Committee. However a greater travelling requirement would be placed on members in respect of site visits, etc.

(c) Equalising Workload

... 13. A schedule is set out in Appendix 3 showing data on planning applications by parish of origin. Three Area Sub-Committees should make it easier to equalise workloads.

14. Three 'general' Sub-Committees should be easier still as applications would be submitted to the next available meeting when they are ready.

(d) Involving all Councillors

15. One concern was that all Councillors should have a seat on Plans Sub-Committees. At present, of the four Area Plans Sub-Committees, three comprise all members. Area Sub-Committee 'A' does not.

16. With three "general" Sub-Committees, it may be possible to establish memberships of 20/19/19, if this is what members wish to achieve.

17. With three local sub-committees, the configuration of areas will determine the number of members who could serve. The number of members for each Sub-Committee may be different but all councillors could be given seats.