

# **Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of meeting: 7 December 2002**

**Subject: Review of Area Plans Sub-Committees**

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**Committee Secretary:**

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## **Recommendations:**

- (1) That no change be made to the pattern of Area Plans Sub-Committees; and**
- (2) That the question of the number of members to serve on Area Plans Sub-Committees be referred to an early meeting of that Sub-Committee for consideration and report back to this Committee.**

## **Report**

1. (Chairman of the Constitutional Affairs SSP) The review of possible changes to the pattern of Area Plans Sub-Committees has been in progress for some time. We have consulted parish and town councils and many members of the Council have attended our meetings. As a result many views, often conflicting ones, have been expressed.
2. It has proved very difficult to achieve a consensus on whether changes should occur and what those changes should be. The main issues which we were asked to cover were:
  - (a) addressing the workload and membership of Area Plans "C";
  - (b) addressing the principle of all members of the Council having a seat on their local Area Sub-Committee;
  - (c) addressing whether the four Area Sub-Committees should be changed; and
  - (d) addressing whether it would be beneficial to change the areas covered by each Sub-Committee.
3. At our last meeting, we considered a report setting out the final four options we had identified previously. These were:
  - (a) changing to a three sub-committee option (Area A + 2 new Subs reflecting a rural/urban split in the rest of the District);
  - (b) adjusting the present four Sub-Committee structure by changing the areas of Areas B and C;
  - (c) changing to a three Sub-Committee structure by combining Areas B and C, leaving Areas A and D unaltered; and
  - (d) the option of no change.
4. There had originally been a fifth option but officers felt that this was probably the same as (c) in paragraph 3.

Our review has clarified the fact that a reduced number of Sub-Committees may improve the speed in determining planning applications but that the improvement may be marginal, as the performance has been improving anyway. We have also established that Planning Delivery Grant based upon improved turn-round times was already being secured but that performance to meet top-quartile targets could be secured only within the context of other improvements, in addition to speeding the cycle of sub-committees.

6. We established that the workload of Area "C" was lower than the other Sub-Committees but, although concerns had been expressed from time to time about Area Plans Sub "C" being inquorate, this was not a regular occurrence. However, the real balance of arguments concerning Area "C" was about local consideration of planning matters as against holding meetings for a relatively small number of applications. Another concern expressed was about travelling distances both by members (to view sites) and the public (to attend meetings).
7. During the consultation and in our discussions there were equally strong lobbies for change and for the status quo.
8. At our last meeting, we decided to resolve the question of whether change was supported before detailed discussion of the options took place. It was decided by a majority to make no change. We therefore did not consider the remaining options.
9. We were asked to look at the question of Area Plan Sub "A" membership. Currently this consists of 15 members out of the 25 representing wards in that part of the District. We were mindful of comments by several Area Plans "A" members that they do not seek change in any aspect of that Sub-Committee. We therefore recommend that the Sub-Committee should be asked to express a view on that point and report back to this Committee.
10. If the Committee accepts our recommendation, our review of this subject has been concluded.
11. The Chairman of the Committee has determined that this item should be dealt with at this meeting as a matter of urgency in order that the review can be concluded now rather than await the Committee's next meeting in February 2007.