

Report to the Constitutional Affairs and Member Services Standing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 20 November 2007



Report of: Assistant to the Chief Executive/Deputy Director
of Planning and Economic Development

Subject: Area Plans Sub - Cycle of Meetings

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Recommendations:

- (1) To consider whether the cycle of Area Plans Sub-Committee meetings should be revised so that there is one meeting of each Area Plans Sub-Committee every three weeks;**
 - (2) To consider a date for implementing this change; and**
 - (3) To consider the need for any consultation on this proposed change.**
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Report:

1. The Council has set challenging targets with the goal of improving turnaround times for planning applications. Currently, most applications which are determined by Area Plans Sub-Committees exceed the target time for determination. This is because at the present time once an application is ready for decision it then has to wait for its appropriate Sub-Committee and this can be a wait between two weeks and six weeks before being determined.
2. The overall target time for routine applications is eight weeks in total and the Panel will appreciate that this waiting period adversely affects the Council's ability to achieve the eight-week timescale.
3. The Constitutional Affairs Panel will be receiving a report later in the year on officer delegation which will make some minor suggestions which may assist the Council in improving its performance. However, such changes will not produce a "step-change" in turnaround times on their own but the combined impact of each action will assist in improving performance.
4. Currently the cycle of Area Plans Sub meetings is a monthly one. As a result of the Council's earlier decision to combine two Area Plans Sub Committees there is currently a "fallow" week when there is no meeting. The proposal for consideration is to change the cycle to three weeks by dispensing with the fallow week. This will increase the number of Area Plans Sub-Committees held during the year but may result in each agenda being shorter than at present.

Consultation

5. The Panel may wish to consider what manner of consultation needs to be conducted regarding this change.

Date for Implementation

6. The Panel would need to report to the full Council regarding this change of procedure before any changes could be made. It may be preferable to introduce these changes with effect from the next Council year (i.e. May 2008) as to do so at an earlier stage may well conflict with existing meetings and create difficulties with booking the local venue used for Area Plans South.

Officer Support Arrangements

7. The increased number of Area Plans Sub-Committees will not have an impact on the staffing requirement from Democratic Services, other than printing, the cost of having the external venue, Committee attendance allowances, travelling expenses etc.
8. In terms of Planning and Economic Development, the Planning Officers are confident that a three weekly cycle can be managed effectively from the point of view of report preparation etc. Indeed, it is their view that it is in the Council's interest to improve the throughput of applications for the reasons stated.