

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF PROVISION OF VALUE FOR MONEY WITHIN PLANNING
SERVICES TASK AND FINISH PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2007
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 9.15 PM**

Members Present: Mrs L Wagland (Chairman), , R Bassett, M Colling and D Jacobs

Other members present: Mrs D Collins, Mrs A Grigg and C Whitbread

Apologies for Absence: R Frankel, 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)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

None reported.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None reported.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel were invited to draft a Terms of Reference for their review. The Panel received a set of guidance notes and a copy of the request which led to the setting up of the Panel.

The Chairman of the Panel invited each member to put forward their ideas for inclusion in the Terms of Reference.

(i) Aims of the Review

It was agreed that the overall aim of the review was to consider in detail the provision of Value for Money within the following Planning Services focusing specifically on:

- Development Control (including Appeals)
- Forward Planning
- Building Control
- Enforcement
- Administration and Customer Support
- Economic Development
- Environment Team

In relation to these matters, the Panel expressed a wish to:

(a) identify the scope of each of these areas and the duties/functions each perform;

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- (b) identify problems, possible solutions, barriers to success;
- (c) review the measures introduced since 2004 to improve performance within Development Control;
- (d) consider staffing levels, turnover, absence rates and whether they were sufficient;
- (e) consider the budgets available to Planning Services, information on costs and revenue, how they were managed;
- (f) identify customers/regular users views of the service.

(ii) Benchmarking:

The Panel expressed a wish to research best practice elsewhere ('Top Quartile' Services) with the goal of identifying ideas for improving performance against targets. The Panel requested that this focus on Authorities' outside Essex but of a similar size to Epping Forest. It was suggested that CIPFA/Performance Management Unit could provide this information.

(iii) IT Issues

The Panel expressed a wish to review the new Planning IT system and consult with the suppliers of the system. It was suggested that a presentation be arranged for the next meeting of the Panel on 3 December 2007.

(iv) Development Control

In relation to the Development Control Function, the Panel raised a number of areas for review as follows:

- (a) officer recommendations on applications - scope for cases without recommendations where the arguments were 'finely balanced';
- (b) Eight Week Target– to review the need to change the delegation scheme to facilitate this;
- (c) to canvass Members of the Councils Planning Committee/Local Councillors to obtain feedback on the review; (through Council Bulletin, Forester Magazine);
- (d) Planning Application Fees – scope for altering this, adding new items to the scheme;
- (f) Case Loads – current cases, process for distributing cases. Was this process fair?

(vi) Policy Issues

Should the Council consider steps to amend its procedures to facilitate this review?

(v) Documents for the Next Meeting:

The Panel asked to receive the following documents:

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- (a) BVPI schedules - summaries of latest schedules for Planning and Economic Development (to be submitted to Panel on a 'rolling basis')
- (b) Best Value Review of Planning Services - Copy of the updated plan 2006/07- (Panel were happy with the format);
- (c) a copy of the recent Customer Services Presentation (Planning Services) J Preston to contact S Tautz about this.

ACTION:

The Panel agreed the attached Terms of Reference for submission to the OSC on 8 November 2007.

4. WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel agreed the attached work plan for its next meeting on 3 December 2007.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The East of England Plan was about to go out for further consultation to take into account environmental assessments. The consultation was to last for 8 weeks and would be brought to this Panel.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

3 December 2007 at 7.30 pm in CR1.