

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE -  
7 JUNE 2023

SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL MEETING – 18 JULY 2023

(To be read in conjunction with the Agenda for the Meeting)

**Present**

Cllr Andy MacLeod (Chair)  
Cllr John Robini (Vice Chair)  
Cllr Carole Cockburn  
Cllr Michael Goodridge

Cllr Gemma Long  
Cllr Peter Nicholson  
Cllr John Ward

**Apologies**

Cllr Janet Crowe

SGP1/23 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 2.)

There were none received from Members.

SGP2/23 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SIZE, COMPOSITION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE OF WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES (Agenda item 3.)

7 Members registered to speak on the item, specifically the proposals around the abolishment of Area Planning Committees.

Cllr Clark – expressed that a single planning committee would be a more equitable position and the knowledge of Neighbourhood plan(s) must be emphasised. He also suggested annual rotating Chairs of the committee.

Cllr Beaman – suggested that the single committee structure was more suitable than the A & B committee structure and suggested that there should be at least 6 Farnham Residents Councillors on the committee.

Cllr Hyman - stated disagreement with the proposals on the grounds that the proposed changes should go through the O&S Services Committee for further scrutiny.

Cllr Martin – stated opposition to the planning committee proposals and noted that the report in appendix 1 does not suggest the abolishment of geographic planning committees. He added that geographic knowledge and context is vital element of Planning as Waverley covers a large geographic area.

Cllr Austin – noted that the PAS report in Appendix 1 did not state the relevance of changing the geographic planning structure. She further referenced the Planning Improvement Peer Group Report of 2018.

Cllr Staunton – raised concerns that non-geographic committees would disadvantage large rural wards.

Cllr Follows – clarified that Ward Councillors would not be excluded from meetings; they would be unable to vote or participate in the debate. He further clarified that proposals set out in the report aimed to remove the possibility of pre-determination. He also noted that the change in committee structure was strongly implied in the PAS report in Appendix 1.

The Committee discussed the proposals and recommendations put forward in the report.

### **Recommendation 2.1.1**

The Committee were in unanimous agreement with the recommendation to rename the Audit Committee to the 'Audit and Risk Committee' and that authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to amend the constitution to reflect this change. The committee were satisfied with the reasons stated in the report, to better reflect the remit of the committee which includes both audit and risk management functions.

### **Recommendation 2.1.2**

The Committee agreed to the recommendation to reduce the size of the 'Audit and Risk Committee' from 8 Councillors to 7 to reflect the change in the size of the Council and that authority be delegated to the monitoring officer to reflect the change.

### **Recommendation 2.1.3**

The Committee agreed to the recommendation to reduce the size of the 'Standards and General Purposes' Committee from 9 Councillors to 7, to reflect the change in the size of the Council.

**Recommendation 2.2;** Changes to the number, size, composition and terms of reference of their Planning Committee(s) to be established for the municipal year 2023/24

### **Proposals 7.8-7.9**

The Chair invited Members to discuss the proposals set out in the report.

The Committee were in agreement about the proposal for Members of the Committee to be substituted by any Member of the Council from the same political group as the absent Member, who had undertaken the mandatory training requirements, other than a Member of the Executive and Ward Members not permitted to participate in the debate nor vote for the determination of any applications in their Ward.

The Committee were in agreement about the proposal for Executive Members to be excluded from Planning Committees and voting/decision making powers within the committees should not be permitted.

Some Members raised concerns about the proposals to abolish the Eastern and Western Planning Committees in favour of a single committee of 15 Members and stated that the report in Appendix 1 did not justify the change to a single committee, nor did it reference the geographic element of the planning committees being problematic. Cllr Goodridge suggested that changing the names of the committees would not save resources or officer time and instead, the Planning Procedure Rules and the way in which planning committees work should be looked into. Cllr Goodridge indicated that the Planning Procedure Rules should include questions for Officers/Legal representatives first, after which the Chair should ask Members if they propose a motion (to agree, refuse or defer) with a seconder and that any counter proposal to the Officer's recommendation must include valid planning grounds before commencing the debate on the motion. Members were in favour of the suggestion to produce a report outlining proposed changes to the Planning Procedure Rules. Susan Sale, Executive Head of Legal and Democratic services, agreed to the Committee's proposal and confirmed that a report highlighting proposed changes to the Procedure Rules and Scheme of Delegation would be brought to the Committee.

Some Councillors emphasized the importance of working on the relationship between Councillors and Officers more closely and in turn avoiding the volume of applications being called into Committee.

Councillors raised concerns about the need for increased site visits, taking up valuable resources and officer/councillor time and slowing the planning process as well as incurring costs. Members commented on the importance of geographic planning committees and implied that geographic knowledge was important in planning and a knowledge of the area was required as Waverley is a geographically vast and complex borough. Cllr Cockburn emphasized the importance of effective and regular training for planning committee Members. Councillors agreed that all Committee Members and substituted should be trained in the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans.

Councillors noted that the PAS report in Appendix 1 highlighted speed of determination as a major issue and argued that changing to a single Planning Committee may not be the solution to this. It was also noted that the PAS report was critical of officers and Members emphasized the importance of a more functional Member/Officer relationship to move the system forward. Members recognised that this is due to staff turnover issues and covid. Cllr Cockburn also noted that higher quality reports and agendas must be produced. Claire Upton Brown, Joint Executive Head of Planning Development, clarified that PAS recommendations had been adopted by the Planning team and they were in the process of attempting to rectify said issues; it was also noted that performance had been above Government Target for Quarters 3-4.

Cllr Reed argued that the changes may not be ideal, but the Council needs to show that they are taking action to avoid designation. Cllr Ward suggested that the single Committee is adopted to remove discrepancies in considerations and that a 12 month review should be scheduled to review progress. He suggested that a 12

month review report of the changes made to the Planning Committee(s) should be presented to this Committee. Susan Sale, Executive Head of Legal and Democratic Services, agreed to this proposal.

Peter Ford, PAS representative, addressed the Committee and confirmed that the change to one planning committee was implied in the PAS report and that it would alleviate some of the time and resources that go into maintaining two Committees, as well as the number of items and frequency of the meetings. Members took these comments on board.

*The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations to Full Council, with a majority vote;*

1. the Council's 'Audit Committee' be re-named the 'Audit and Risk Committee' and that authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to amend the constitution to reflect the change.
2. the size of the 'Audit Committee' or 'Audit and Risk Committee' be reduced from 8 councillors to 7 and authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to amend the constitution to reflect the change.
3. the size of Council's Standards and General Purposes Committee be reduced from 9 councillors to 7 and authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to amend the constitution to reflect the change.
4. the size of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee be reduced from 12 councillors to 11 and authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to amend the constitution to reflect the change.
5. The Eastern and Western Planning Committees be abolished and replaced by one Planning Committee comprising 15 members appointed in accordance with political balance who have completed mandatory training requirements, not to include any member of the Executive, with terms of reference to include determination of planning applications from anywhere in the borough that are not delegated to the Joint Executive Head of Planning Development; and, with members being able to be substituted by any member of the Council who has undertaken the mandatory training requirements from the same political group as the absent member, other than an Executive member; and Ward members not to be permitted to participate in the debate nor vote for the determination of any applications in their Ward but be able to make representations to open and close the committee debate on such applications in accordance with current Council Procedure Rules.
6. The Standards & General Purposes Committee receives a report in 12 months to review the performance and effectiveness of the new planning committee.

7. The Standards and General Purposes Committee receives a report reviewing the delegations to the Executive Head of Planning Development within the Council's Officer Scheme of Delegation.
8. The Standards and General Purposes Committee receives a report reviewing the Planning Committee procedure rules within the Constitution.
9. Subject to the outcome of Council consideration of the Committee's proposals, Council notes the revised proportional allocation of committee seats.

**The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 6.05 pm**

**Chairman**