

All Member Briefing - Planning Peer Review

Monday 3 December 2018

Feedback from Members on Recommendations and Action Plan

Recommendation R2

Significantly increase Officer and political oversight of housing delivery and key Local Plan priorities including learning from good practice elsewhere.

Proposed actions:

- Promote Local Plan delivery
- Member presentation on Housing Delivery
- Include Housing Delivery and five year Housing Land Supply information in Quarterly Performance report and Planning Committee reports to provide up to date tracking against targets
- Engage with other local authorities in respect of best practice regarding driving delivery agenda

Feedback

- How is 'promoting Local Plan delivery' different to what we already do?
- Since LPP1 was adopted, most Joint Planning Committees have considered Reserved Matters applications – it is reasonable to challenge these at a detailed level.

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	81%
Undecided	19%
Not agree	0

Recommendation 3

Planning Service has to reprioritise focus on growth delivery by re-examining roles, responsibilities, targets and working with internal and external delivery partners.

Proposed actions:

- defaulting major housing consents to two years implementation;
- limiting pre-commencement conditions and being more explicit with the stage in the development process when a condition needs to be discharged
- help developers find suitable registered housing providers by having housing delivery specialists embedded into the decision making team;
- develop account manager type role for certain sites so that Officers own development from application to construction
- having a clear understanding of which sites are stalled and finding innovative, customer-centred solutions to unblock these stalled sites
- work with developers/agents to think imaginatively and creatively about unimplemented consents.
- Use expertise from within the Council more effectively including affordable housing delivery/viability
- senior level political engagement with landowners and developers, to throw political weight behind unblocking constraints, especially in relation to joint public service collaboration.

Feedback

- Can't see what we would do differently to get an improvement.
- Not sure that political engagement in planning is appropriate.
- We should challenge developers to be realistic in their projections for completions.

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	55%
Undecided	41%
Not agree	4%

Recommendation 8

Examine opportunities for stronger co-ordination in place shaping with the four larger settlements to maximise partnership opportunities.

Proposed actions:

- establish a cross-service Officer/Member working group with key partners to provide improved co-ordination of place shaping in four larger settlements
- prepare joint place shaping strategy to be agreed by Executive to identify and promote actions to maximise place shaping opportunities.

Feedback

- In Cranleigh, the opportunity to 'place-shape' has been lost; there is only around 100 permissions left to be granted.
- Members too focussed on what has happened – we need to be looking forward.
- Members have different understanding of what 'place-shaping' means – more focussed on local partners (town and parish councils, chambers of commerce, etc) than LEP or housing providers.

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	48%
Undecided	19%
Not agree	33%

Recommendation 7

Review capacity to support Parish and Town Councils and communities to develop Neighbourhood Plans.

Proposed actions:

- review progress of Neighbourhood Plans across the Borough and capacity/necessity for greater support from Waverley Planning Team
- establish a programme of more regular review meetings with Town and Parish Councils which support front loading of progress on Neighbourhood Plans and to include joint project management

Feedback

- This is the first clear recommendation!
- Implies a need for more resources in Planning.
- A better level of engagement between officers and NP teams is needed to understand each other's perspectives.

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	100%
Undecided	0%
Not agree	0%

Recommendation 4

Explore opportunities to rebuild trust and confidence in planning decisions making between Members and Officers and externally with customers and stakeholders.

Proposed actions:

- joint workshops for Officers/Members on planning and opportunities for closer working with Members/Stakeholders
- Town and Parish Council Workshops to explain planning process including national delivery agenda

Feedback

- Assume that the criticism came from interviews with externals?
- Public perception may be one of a lack of trust ...
- Surprised at the level of criticism and concerned at the blindness to the strength of feeling of objectors – tone of the review is a bit shallow, over-optimistic
- Member upset at the inference of a lack of trust
- But, take a look at some of the webcasts!
- Webcasts indicate there is an issue – much of the Leader’s time is spent dealing with Members and planning matters.
- Symptom of a long-term lack of investment and foresight in the Planning Service – under investment has led to high turnover.
- More training needed for Members so that they have better understanding of planning and are able to explain reasons for a recommendation to residents rather than just calling in an application. Officers need to understand better the perspective of local Members.
- Town and Parish councils need more information/feedback in planning decisions.

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	86%
Undecided	14%
Not agree	0%

Recommendation 5

Revisit customer engagement Improvement Plan to reflect need for significant step-up in satisfaction with customers and stakeholders through close working with Communications Team.

Proposed actions:

- continue with implementation of action in Development Management Improvement Plan 2018 in respect of customer engagement
- establish a programme of customer care and team working training for all staff within the Service
- establish a programme of management and leadership training for managers and team leaders
- Parish and Town Council training meetings including roadshows around the borough

- Agents' Forums and Developer Forum meetings

Feedback

- Add Civic Societies to the list of groups we have regular meetings with
- Are more resources needed to achieve this?

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	100%
Undecided	0%
Not agree	0%

Recommendation 6

Review learning and development plans for Members and Officers focussing on opportunities for joint work and training to build team work and a stronger understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Proposed actions:

- scope and set up learning and development programme on Planning for Members to include:
 - planning growth/delivery agenda
 - making defensible planning decisions
 - the role of Planning Committee - planning for sustainable development and delivery of LP
- scope and set up learning and development programme for Officers:
 - effective working with Members
 - effective customer engagement
 - leadership (for Managers)
 - Design

Feedback

- No argument with the recommendation, but we have had some really poor presenters (Trevor Roberts Associates?). We need to get good, engaging presenters.
- Officers need training in presentation skills so that they are better able to share their knowledge. (Members, too!)
- Training is needed not just for Planning Committee members (all Members)
- Beneficial for some training shared with officers and Members.

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	96%
Undecided	4%

Not agree	0%
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Recommendation 1

Improve the operation and efficiency of planning decision making through increasing delegation, simplifying and adhering to agreed protocols and creating one borough wide Planning Committee in line with detailed suggestions in this report.

Proposed actions:

- review Scheme of Delegation for Planning by increasing delegation and review of Member call-in arrangements
- create one borough-wide Planning Committee
- Establish new protocol where Ward Member cannot vote on Planning Committee in relation to Ward matters (differentiate between Committee role and community representation role). Ward Member to be limited to same time given to objectors and supporters.
- Site visits protocol reviewed, made simpler and better planned.

Feedback

- Borough-wide approach works in JPC but will need some work to persuade [Members of this approach overall]
- Residents convinced Waverley doesn't listen – this will need to be handled carefully.
- Dynamite! Local planning decisions work well, democratic, easy to explain,
- Don't see that 'efficiency' requires there to be one borough-wide committee
- Planning process is not democratic – it is quasi-judicial; endorse action point 3 (ward members not to vote on planning applications in their ward).
- One planning committee is a ridiculous idea, but agree re action point 3.
- Don't see link between improved delivery and more time
- Sympathise with the burden for officers of evening meetings; we could start earlier but that would eat in to the working day for officers; fewer members on committee would mean more questions outside of committee, so counter productive; risk of having too many applications on an agenda that some don't get proper consideration – 6-8 is too many on an agenda (only allows 20minutes each). Case is not made for 1 committee.
- Quality decision-making is important and requires local knowledge; it's not all objective matters
- Don't agree with any of the actions! Bizarre for ward members to speak but not vote!
- Don't agree with the approach – planning performance on speed and quality of decision-making is good
- Action 3 – appalling

- Action point 3 deserves more consideration – don't throw the baby out with the bath water!

Further suggestion -

- Apply the 4 minute rule for speaking by Members at all Planning Committees.

Voting: on Action Point 3 only (Ward members not to vote on applications in their ward)

Agree	30%
Undecided	14%
Not agree	56%

Voting on broad agreement with proposed actions:

Agree	14%
Undecided	9%
Not agree	77%