



Report to Growth Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

Date: 15th December 2022

Title: Member Engagement in Planning – Recommendation Update

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1. Background

- 1.1. The Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee agreed to set up a rapid review into Member Engagement in Planning at its meeting on 14th October 2021. The Chairman asked Cllr Chris Poll if he would chair the review group and four other councillors volunteered to participate.
- 1.2. During November and December 2021, the review group collected evidence through meetings and by conducting a survey of elected members and planning staff. The review group then met in January to discuss and agree its key findings and recommendations.
- 1.3. Cabinet had considered and endorsed the recommendations of The Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committees rapid review into Member Engagement in Planning at the Cabinet meeting on 1 March 2022. During discussions, it was agreed that the Member Development Working group should take a lead in actioning some of the recommendations, particularly on guidance notes for members and officers, meet the planner 'informal' events and on political awareness training.
- 1.4. The Member Development Working Group considered their proposed level of involvement in implementing some of the recommendations at their meeting in May 22. It was agreed that a scoping document for addressing the recommendations within the responsibility of the MDWG be presented to the July meeting. The subsequently approved scoping document is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Update on Member Engagement Recommendations

- 2.1 The requirement to establish the MDWG involvement and the subsequent need to seek approval from MDWG on the scope of activities, has delayed initial commencement of the GIH Select Committee recommendations presented in March 2022. The full scoping of activities required by MDWG was not concluded until July 2022.

- 2.2 The table below sets out an update on progress against recommendations, including where necessary revised timescales and remedial actions.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 The Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee will receive a further updated after 12 months to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.

4. Background Information

[Cabinet Minutes](#) of the meeting held on 1 March 2022.

[Minutes of the meeting of Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee](#)
14th October 2021.

5. Appendices

Appendix One – MWDG approved scoping (July 2022)

Appendix Two – Planning Surgeries Review (January – November 2022)



Member Engagement in Planning – Recommendations from the GIH Select Committee review group

Chairman – Cllr Chris Poll

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines	MDWG involvement	Update November 2022
1. A Member Planning Handbook should be produced to provide members with practical information that will assist them in dealing with local planning casework.	<p>This recommendation is agreed. This project will need scoping to understand the nature of content required and format to best support members with casework. It is recommended that this is developed with member input.</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Gareth Williams</p> <p>Scoping: to be completed within 3 months</p> <p>Completion: to be completed within 6 months</p>	<p>That the MDWG be consulted on the scope for the handbook with a draft shared with the MDWG as part of the sign off process.</p>	<p>Scope agreed by MDWG in July. The Member Planning Handbook will include the following chapters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Applications – types of application • Consultee and Public Access – viewing and commenting on planning applications, weekly lists and tracking cases • Determining Planning Applications – delegated decisions, call in, committees • Permitted Development rights • Planning Appeals • Planning Enforcement (inc. Gypsies and Travellers) • Planning Policy – national, local, neighbourhood plans and 5 year housing land supply • Section 106 and CIL – identifying mitigation, securing mitigation, CIL, how CIL is spent • Acronyms

	The completion date will be dependent on the scope of the project and the associated time that it will take to deliver by the Planning Service.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Induction for new members – including training and attending a planning committee <p>Draft handbook to be completed at the end of February 2023, for MDWG to review and sign off.</p> <p>This will be made available through the Source expanding on existing content: https://internal.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/members-area/guidance-training-2021/member-involvement-planning-applications/</p> <p>The member handbook will thereafter be reviewed and where necessary updated as part of the annual member refresher training programme.</p> <p>Revised Timescale:</p> <p>End of March 2023 (allowing for Cabinet Member sign off and MDWG approvals)</p>
2. All members should be able to access and receive training on how to use a GIS map to enable them to look up planning application details and other useful	This recommendation is agreed. Whilst the Planning Service are the data owners, the GIS Mapping Systems are the responsibility of IT Services. IT and Digital	Tony Ellis/ Gareth Williams	N/A	<p>This will be subject to a separate business case that is being developed with IT services. This will require the Council to move onto one front facing GIS system, which will require funding. Initial estimates are in the region of 13k, based on the new Esri platform. In addition this will require us being on a single IT network, the delivery of which has been delayed due to world shortage of the necessary IT equipment.</p> <p>As part of the business case, we would need to agree the planning constraints data to be published, which will need to be grouped in batches according to priority due to the volume of layers held in each of the legacy areas (circa 1000). It should also be noted that the existing data quality is very variable and the time that is involved to combine legacy data sets to ensure the new layer was in a similar format and</p>

<p>information such as flood plains, conservation areas etc to help them respond to planning queries from residents.</p>	<p>services are currently reviewing options to make the requested content available.</p>			<p><i>the data could be relied upon as being accurate, will increase the delivery timescales for the project initially indicated.</i></p> <p><i>The project will therefore initially focus on more static constraint layers (Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Areas, Chilterns AONB, Assets of Community Value, etc) , and leaving the more dynamic planning application data until after the One Uniform project is completed.</i></p> <p>Revised Timescales</p> <p>To be confirmed following development and approval of Business Case and securing of funding and resource.</p>
<p>3. A short guidance note should be provided for officers and members explaining the benefits of working in partnership, to enable public participation in planning and promote</p>	<p>This recommendation is agreed. A short guide will be produced by the Planning Service, in consultation with the Cabinet member and deputies. This will also refer to the Constitution and established</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Gareth Williams</p> <p>Timescales: 3 months</p>	<p>That the MDWG should have sight of the draft guidance note as part of the sign off process.</p>	<p><i>Draft to be presented to MDWG in the New Year prior to circulation to officers and members. This will include a brief description of Member and Officer roles in Planning, including policy development, planning applications and enforcement; the benefits of collaborative working; communication channels and turn around times. The focus will however be on the use of surgeries for casework rather than on emails.</i></p> <p><i>The Planning Protocol (appendix to the Council's Constitution) will be appended in full</i> <i>(https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s35416/CouncilConstitution.pdf)</i></p> <p>Revised Timescale: End of February 2023 (allowing Cabinet Member sign off and MDWG approval).</p>

<p>a wider understanding of the process. This should set out reasonable expectations in terms of how queries will be managed, including timescales.</p>	<p>Planning Protocol.</p>			
<p>4. A series of 'informal' Meet the Planners events should be held to enable members and officers to meet and chat in a relaxed atmosphere, to help to cultivate</p>	<p>This recommendation is agreed. The Planning Service will work with Democratic Services to arrange a series of events over the next 12 months. This will be delivered by</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Peter Strachan</p> <p>Timescales: 12 months</p>	<p>That the MDWG should be sighted on proposed dates for these events as part of the wider Member Briefing programme.</p>	<p>MDWG agreed the following scope in July:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly in person events tied in with updates/trainings on key areas (e.g., Permitted Development, Planning Appeals, AONB, Enforcement, Green Belt, Call-ins etc) 30-minute presentation, 10-minute Q&A, followed by teas and coffees/networking This will be part of a revised training offer to all members, moving away from generic 'planning training' and instead providing more focussed sessions on areas of planning that are important to local ward members. <p>The first formal event will be held in February 2023 and will cover the planning application call-in process.</p>

trust and collaboration.	committee area.			<p>Concerns have been raised following poor member attendance at recent events held by the Planning Service, including training provided at request on the Council's 5-year housing land supply (with only 30 members in attendance over two scheduled events).</p> <p>It is therefore proposed that the attendance be monitored and feedback from attendees regularly reviewed to ensure the sessions are beneficial, noting the officer time commitment in preparing and attending.</p>
<p>5. Political Awareness training should be offered to planning staff to support them in working effectively with Members. This could be facilitated by the Democratic Services team, who would work with the</p>	<p>This recommendation is agreed. The Planning Service will work with Democratic Services to deliver training to support staff.</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Gareth Williams</p> <p>Scope Content: 2 months Deliver training: 3-6 months</p>	<p>That the MDWG be consulted on the scope of the training as part of the sign off process.</p>	<p>During September and October, six sessions were scheduled, hosted by the Cabinet Member or Deputy Cabinet Members for Planning and Regeneration, alongside a Planning Committee Chairman and the Democratic Services team. Over 100 members of staff attended the sessions.</p> <p>The sessions included opportunities for informal discussions where staff were able to share their experiences of working with members and seek advice about different situations. Feedback from the sessions has been shared with the Management team and will also be shared with the Member Development Working Group, who oversee training and development for members.</p> <p>Political awareness training will be provided corporately moving forward by Dem Services as part of the induction process.</p>

Head of Planning and Development to agree content and delivery timescales.				
6. There should be a review of the new Member Surgeries in June 2022 to consider the level of participation and feedback from both members and officers regarding their effectiveness.	<p>This recommendation is agreed. A review will be undertaken in June, including surveys and feedback from both members and officers. A subsequent update will be provided for the Select Committee.</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Gareth Williams</p> <p>Review: June 2022</p>	N/A	<p><i>A review of the member surgeries was undertaken in November 2022 by the Planning Business Support Team. This included;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Survey of planning staff and members regarding the effectiveness of planning surgeries (to be included in the Leader's email to local members).</i> <i>Review number of surgeries and attendance by members and officers.</i> <p><i>Since the 10th January 2022 until the date of the review we have held 52 surgeries, engaging with 37 separate ward members.</i></p> <p><i>Overall, Members have found the Surgeries useful and appreciate Team leaders/officers spending time to go through issues and find surgeries an opportunity to improve on their planning knowledge. Some Members however feel a simple phone call or email is more time efficient rather than waiting for a surgery.</i></p> <p><i>The majority of Majority of officers believe the Surgery process is a useful mechanism to communicate with Members. Officers find Members are still sending emails and calling in to the offices and the officer then tries to point them</i></p>

				<p><i>towards the Surgery process. This is to be addressed in the guidance note, which will cover communication and how to access the Planning Service.</i></p> <p><i>In addition the Planning Service have established Strategic Sites Working Groups. The purpose of these groups is to improve engagement on strategic allocations with local ward members. These sessions run from pre-application, outline and reserved matters stages of the development and have input from the developer. I would note that this is not a decision making forum. The meetings are held quarterly, albeit this may be reduced or increased depending on the stage of the development in discussions with the lead planning officer. Initial feedback from Members who have attended these sessions have been extremely positive.</i></p>
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