



# Report to Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023

**Title:** Member Engagement in Planning – Recommendations 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.
- 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.
- 1.5. A progress update was provided to the Growth Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and this report provides an overview of the implementation of the recommendations.

## 2. Main content of report

- 2.1 The table below sets out an update on progress against recommendations

Recommendation	Response	Lead Member/Officer	Timescales	Update June 2023
<p><b>A Member Planning Handbook should be produced to provide members with practical information that will assist them in dealing with local planning casework.</b></p>	<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>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.</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Peter Strachan</p>	<p><b>MDWG meeting 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023</b></p>	<p><i>The draft Member Planning Handbook (Appendix 3) has been shared with the Member Development Working Group and is in the process of being updated to reflect comments received. The final version is to be presented at the Member Development Working Group meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July for sign-off.</i></p> <p><i>Once agreed, this will be made available through the Source expanding on existing content:</i></p> <p><a href="https://internal.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/members-area/guidance-training-2021/member-involvement-planning-applications/">https://internal.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/members-area/guidance-training-2021/member-involvement-planning-applications/</a></p> <p><i>The member handbook will thereafter be reviewed and where necessary updated as part of the annual member refresher training programme.</i></p>



<p><b>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 information such as flood plains, conservation areas etc to help them respond to planning queries from residents.</b></p>	<p>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 services are currently reviewing options to make the requested content available.</p>	<p>Tony Ellis/ Steve Bambrick/Peter Strachan</p>	<p><i>To be confirmed following development and approval of Business Case and securing of funding and resource.</i></p>	<p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>The GIS team have funding to build a new server this year and then when we are on a single domain (18 months) all the various GIS layers can be put in one place.</i></p> <p><i>We will 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 the data could be relied upon as being accurate, will increase the delivery timescales for the project.</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>
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<p><b>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 a wider understanding of the process. This should set out reasonable expectations in terms of how queries will be managed, including timescales.</b></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 Planning Protocol.</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Gareth Williams</p>	<p><b>MDWG meeting 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023</b></p>	<p><i>The guidance note forms an appendix to the Member Planning Handbook (Appendix 3). The draft has been shared with the Member Development Working Group and is in the process of being updated to reflect comments received. The final version is to be presented at the Member Development Working Group meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July for sign-off.</i></p> <p><i>Once agreed, this will be shared with officers and made available through the Bucks Net expanding on existing content:</i></p> <p><a href="https://internal.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/members-area/guidance-training-2021/member-involvement-planning-applications/">https://internal.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/members-area/guidance-training-2021/member-involvement-planning-applications/</a></p>
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<p><b>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 trust and collaboration.</b></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 committee area.</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Peter Strachan</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>	<p><i>MDWG agreed the following scope in July:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>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)</i></li> <li>• <i>30-minute presentation, 10-minute Q&amp;A, followed by teas and coffees/networking</i></li> <li>• <i>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.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The first formal event was held in February 2023 and covered the planning application call-in process. The next session is due to take place on the 19th of June 2023 and is on Biodiversity Net Gain.</i></p> <p><i>It is 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.</i></p> <p><i>The Meet the Planner Events will be reviewed as part of the annual member refresher training programme by the MDWG.</i></p>
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<p><b>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 Head of Planning and Development to agree content and delivery timescales.</b></p>	<p>This recommendation is agreed. The Planning Service will work with Democratic Services to deliver training to support staff.</p>	<p>Steve Bambrick/Peter Strachan</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>	<p><i>During September and October 2022, 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.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>Political awareness training will be provided corporately moving forward by Dem Services as part of the induction process.</i></p>
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<p><b>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.</b></p>	<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/Peter Strachan</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>	<p><i>Please refer to Appendix 2 of the report.</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 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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### **3. Next steps and review**

- 3.1 The draft planning Member Handbook is to be presented to the Member Development Working Group at the next meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July. Once agreed the Planning Member Handbook will be circulated to all Members and made available on the Bucks Net.
- 3.2 It is recommended that the remaining actions, identified in the table below, be monitored and reviewed by the Member Development Working Group.

### **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 (November 2022-March 2023)**

**Appendix Three – Member Planning Handbook DRAFT document**

