

2 November 2015

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee

Planning Process Review

Report of: *Gordon Glenday*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 24 March 2015, Ordinary Council unanimously approved a report relating to the review of the planning service's processes and procedures. This review included a change in the way that the Council operates its planning service in relation to planning applications, incorporating the replacement of the former "weekly list" with an email alert process.
- 1.2 The changes were approved with the aim of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning service. This modernisation agenda still remains the focus. However, some concern over various aspects of the new approach have been raised and in order to move ahead and provide Brentwood with a robust planning service, a review of the new process is needed. This will provide an opportunity to identify and iron out any weaknesses. The new approach is to ensure that we deliver an efficient and effective planning service for all.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That a cross party member working group (Conservatives: 4, LDs: 2, Labour: 1) be established to identify any changes or improvements that are needed to the new system.**
- 2.2 That the findings and recommended actions of the review be reported to the PFR committee on the 15th December 2015 for formal adoption.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 As the Council's resources become ever tighter, the need to improve the effectiveness of services is paramount in order to achieve value for money. Consequently, the Modern Planning Service report, approved in March 2015, introduced a number of new processes and procedures With the aim of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's planning service.
- 3.2 Replacing the former "weekly list" of planning reports with an email alert was one of the main initiatives introduced. This approach encourages ward member involvement from an early stage of an application. By doing this, members could discuss the individual cases with the planning officers and so better understand the planning issues relating to the proposal from the outset. That way, members would have more of an opportunity to have their legitimate planning concerns and issues taken into account before officers made a final recommendation.
- 3.3 Increased delegation of planning decisions to the Head of Planning was also seen as a way of speeding up the decision making process. This was seen as a measure to help residents and developers get on with their household extensions and other developments without any undue delay.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Now that the Modern Planning Service has been operating for just over 6 months, it is prudent to review the processes and procedures to make sure that they are helping deliver the service that the Council wants.
- 4.2 The issues are on the practical introduction of the new system, not in regards to audit matters so this can run separately. Hence, it can be removed from the report or if included, it can be worded so as it is noted .
- 4.3 Over the coming weeks, users of the service, including members, officers and Parish Councils will be invited to give their views on the Modern Planning Service. This will include asking if there are any recommended improvements to the processes and procedures currently operating.
- 4.4 Once the review has been completed, a report from the Head of Planning and Development will be brought to the PFR Committee in December 2015 outlining the review findings and any recommended changes to the planning service's procedures.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 The Modern Planning service has been in operation for around 6 months now so there is a need to make sure that it is fit for purpose. A review is therefore needed to assess how well the new process is working and to see if any improvements are needed to increase its effectiveness.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The review of the Modern Planning service will involve consulting a range of service users to feed into the recommendations to go to PFR Committee in December 2015. Groups to be consulted will incorporate Members, Parish Councils and Members of the Public.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 The Modern Planning Service supports the Modern Council theme of the Corporate Plan. It also relates to the Vision for Brentwood 2016 – 2019 purpose to ensure the provision of efficient and effective services. A review of the service will ensure that these objectives are maximised.
- 7.2 The Planning Service as a whole also supports the Prosperous Borough theme by promoting quality development and growth.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 8.1 Reviewing the Modern Planning service will ensure that any new efficiencies to the Council's processes are incorporated into our day to day operations, leading to potential savings in the future.

Legal Implications

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- 8.2 By reviewing as a matter of good practice the Modern Planning service, the Council will discharge its statutory duty under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and also ensure full compliance with the Council's constitution and other statutory obligations.

8.3 In order to decide how to discharge this general duty of best value, the Council is required to consult those representatives listed in section 3(2) of that Act. The Council is also required to have regard to statutory guidance in deciding how to fulfil that general duty, who to consult and the form, content and timing of such consultations. The latest guidance was issued by DCLG in March 2015 is entitled 'Revised Best Value Statutory Guidance'.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

8.4 No other implications are identified.

9. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

9.1 The 24 March 2015 Ordinary Council "Modern Planning Service" report is appended.

10. Appendices to this report

Appendix A - 24 March 2015 Ordinary Council report and associated appendices on "Modern Planning Service"

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