

Planning Applications Committee Training

Report by Head of Planning Applications Group to the Planning Applications Committee on 17 March 2009

Summary: Draft Member Training Programme June 2009 – March 2010

Recommendation: To note the report and subject to any comments made by Members at the meeting endorse the suggested training programme.

Local Member: n/a

Unrestricted

Background

1. Members of the Planning Applications and Regulation Committees and substitutes are required to undertake training relating to the business of the Committees. This requirement is a recommendation of the 1997 Nolan Committee into Standards in Public Life. More recently, the Government's Planning Advisory Service has stated that it expects

each member to be trained to a level of competency in development control practice, has a sound knowledge of an authority's planning policies, and understands the rules of probity in planning.

It is widely recognised that planning is a complex area for anyone to engage in and that Member training is considered to improve the quality and predictability of planning decisions. The need for training is embedded in the Council's constitution through the Standards Committee Advice Note 4.

2. For the Planning Applications Committee this training has taken a variety of forms including core training at the start of each new administration, supplemented by training throughout the year on specific topics and tours of permitted sites. Appropriate training is required before Members can sit on the Committee.
3. As part of the preparations for a new Committee - post the Council elections this June, Legal and Democratic Services are currently putting together a programme of Members Training for the new administration. I have been asked to input into this process for the Planning Applications Committee. One day has been provisionally allocated for the initial training. In light of the amount of training being undertaken by Members at that time, a request has been made for a variety of training techniques.
4. As a starting point I have considered the draft set of competences developed by the Planning Advisory Service which identifies the skills that it considers are necessary to deliver the best outcomes from the planning system. It identifies the following core skills –
 - a) scrutiny and challenge;
 - b) communication;
 - c) working in partnership – take evidence from a variety of sources; understand and withstand pressures; respect and trust;
 - d) political understanding – recognise and understand different agendas; balance interests, be consistent and display courage in difficult situations;
 - e) understanding the spatial planning system – balance key issues and

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- advice; understand the importance of policy; identify and evaluate considerations and evidence; ask relevant questions, analyse complex information;
- f) development management – understand wider spatial planning and sustainability issues in the context of planning proposals; ability to move from micro to macro; ability to read plans;
- g) Understanding the development process – understand the role and limitations of the Authority; recognise the interest and motives of development proponents and opponents.
5. A number of these issues are expected to be addressed as part of the more generic corporate training for the new administration. Some of the skills however are more appropriate to be delivered as part of the specific Planning Application Committee training. As a result I consider that training for the new Planning Applications Committee should specifically address the following:
- Probity considerations including Relationship with Executive function
 - Material planning considerations
 - The Development Plan
 - Introduction to waste planning considerations
 - Introduction to mineral planning considerations
 - Planning appeals
 - Planning enforcement
 - Update on new and emerging legislation
6. Subject to Committee agreement I would also wish to continue with a programme of training throughout the year. This would allow for more in depth training on specific topics identified by the business and would include tours of permitted sites. Suggested topics include environmental impact assessment, (including screening and scoping processes), appropriate assessment, an update on the emerging Mineral and Waste Development Framework, issues concerning community development, legal agreements and a more in depth coverage of different waste technologies.
7. In the past the Committee has received more detailed training on Sustainable Design, Development and Flood Risk, Planning White Paper, Sustainable Design (Part 2), Heritage and Archaeology, Renewable Energy, East Kent Site Tour, West Kent Site Tour and Landscape and Nature Conservation.
8. Prior to finalising the details of the training programme, I seek the views of the current Committee on whether the emerging programme is appropriate. In particular based upon their experience I would welcome its view whether the programme will equip Members with the necessary skills to fulfil the role needed for the next Planning Applications Committee.

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RECOMMENDATION

9. I RECOMMEND that the Committee NOTES the report and subject to any comments made by Members at the meeting ENDORSES the suggested training programme set out in paragraphs 5 and 6 above.

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Background Documents: Report of the Nolan Committee on Standards of Conduct in Local Government in England, Scotland and Wales 1997, Planning Advisory Service guidance on Planning Committee Training