

Report of the Strategic Director of Place to the meeting of the Regulatory and Appeals Committee to be held on 6 February 2020

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Subject:

AMALGAMATION OF AREA PLANNING PANELS

Summary statement:

This report relates to proposals to merge the two Area Planning Panels into one single Planning Panel due to the gradual decrease in number of planning applications being dealt with at the existing Keighley and Shipley Area Planning Panel and the Bradford Area Planning Panel. The Regulatory and Appeals Committee would continue to consider strategically significant and major applications with the other applications being dealt with at a single Planning Panel which would meet more regularly to ensure applications are determined in a timely manner and performance targets continue to be met.

The report recommends implementation of the new panel arrangements for the next municipal year.

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Portfolio:

Regeneration, Planning and Transport

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Regeneration & Economy

SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks the approval of this Committee to retain the Regulatory & Appeals Committee and its current planning remit and merge the two Area Planning Panels into one single Planning Panel. Due to the increased number of planning applications that would need to be dealt with by a single Planning Panel and the need to determine applications in a timely manner and maintain performance targets, it is proposed that it would meet more regularly, every three weeks. It is also proposed that the number of members on the panel remains as 7 with a quorum of 4.
- 1.2 Subject to rules on political balance, the composition of the new panel would so far as possible continue to reflect the geographical make up of the area with a requirement for at least one member from each parliamentary constituency and an additional two members.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Currently, the Committee considers strategically significant and major planning applications as part of its overall regulatory remit. Other planning applications required to be determined by Planning Panel under the scheme of delegation are determined by two Area Planning Panels. One deals with Bradford constituency items and the other with Keighley /Shipley constituency items. The Regulatory and Appeals Committee as well as the Area Planning Panels meet every calendar month. Currently there are seven members on each panel.
- 2.2 Whilst the items referred to R&A Committee since the municipal year 2012/13 has been relatively constant, those dealt with by the two Area Planning Panels has seen a year on year reduction with a combined total of 155 items in 2012/13 to 93 being considered by the two panels in 2018/19. On average the Bradford Planning Panel considers 5 items at each meeting whilst Keighley/Shipley considers 4 items. As a result there has been an increase in the number of meetings cancelled due to a lack of business. In the last year there have been 4 Bradford Panels and 2 Keighley/ Shipley panels cancelled. Proposals for merging of the two area panels would result in a more efficient use of member and officer time as well as result in cost savings to the Council.
- 2.3 There would be reduced costs in relation to member allowances which would include a reduced cost of SRAs (Special Responsibility Allowances). Each Panel Chair receives £12,970 (18/19) and each Panel member receives an allowance of £2,965, resulting in a potential saving of 7 allowances totalling £30,760 (Chair's SRA £12,970 + 6 Member Allowances £17,790). Owing to the workload involved it is suggested that the Deputy Chair of the single Panel receive an SRA set at 20% of the Leader's SRA (£7,411). The potential saving would thus amount to £26,314. There would be operational efficiencies for Planning Officers, Legal Officers and Committee Secretariat as a result of servicing two Planning Committees/Panels rather than three. There would also be potential reduced servicing costs around transport requirements (mini bus hire) for member site visits and production of agendas and minutes as a result of a reduction of 1 Planning Panel, together with scope for technological progress with the potential introduction of web casting of

meetings making them more accessible and transparent to the wider public.

- 2.4 One of the significant benefits of merging the two panels is that it should assist in achieving more consistency in consideration of planning applications and decision making as the same Members would be making decisions across the District. This has the potential to assist the Council's performance on planning appeals. With the reduced number of panels and pool of members there would also be a greater opportunity to identify specific planning training needs for Panel Members and Officers.
- 2.5 In relation to venue as it stands the Bradford Planning Panel meets at Bradford City Hall whilst the venue for the Keighley/ShIPLEY Planning Panel is Keighley Town Hall. These arrangements can sometimes be an issue for local groups who wish to have the meeting take place more locally. A single Area Panel may allow more flexibility around location depending on the geographical make up of agenda items. The precise location for each meeting would be determined by the AD Planning Transportation and Highways in consultation with the Chair.
- 2.6 Across West Yorkshire all Authorities have a Committee to deal with strategically significant applications. There are a varying number of Area Planning Panels in each district with Wakefield and Calderdale having one Central Planning Panel to deal with all Committee items, whilst Leeds and Kirklees have two area panels.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 As a result of having just one area panel site visits may take longer due to a wider geographical area and longer distances being travelled to each site. However, this would be off set by the time and other costs saved with a single panel meeting.
- 3.2 The increase in length of meetings would mean that attendees – applicants/ objectors/Ward Councillors - could be kept waiting for longer periods than currently, although it is proposed to increase the regularity of the meeting from 4-5 weeks to every three weeks. This would enable improved management around the number of agenda items and the general running of meetings. Also, with one panel there would be increased scope for improving processes at the meeting itself. There could be an opportunity to review the scheme of delegation to officers if numbers of applications increase significantly.
- 3.3 It is likely that there will be an increased reliance on alternates due to the increased rate that meetings are held which will be affected by the availability of Panel Members. However, with one panel there is the potential for increased co-ordination of members attending the meetings.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 As per paragraph 2.3.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1 The report sets out the implications of the recommendations if they are approved.

5.2 The Committee may appoint a Planning Panel comprising of seven members of the Council appointed in compliance with section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and so far as possible reflecting the geography of the District. The quorum of the Planning Panel shall be four members.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 Any changes to the arrangements for the panels will need to be approved by full Council and consequential amendments made to the Constitution by the City Solicitor (JF)

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

There may be occasions when particular agenda items would be dealt with more distantly than at present, which may be an issue for those wishing to attend who have mobility problems, but the flexibility of organising the location of the meeting, along with the possibility of webcasting meetings in the future, should mitigate this

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None to report

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

None to report

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

There are no community safety implications.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

No implications.

7.6 TRADE UNION

There are no trade union implications.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

The Planning Panel will consist of at least one member from the Bradford East, Bradford West and Bradford South constituencies and one member from each of the Shipley and Keighley constituencies.

7.8 **IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

There are no corporate parenting implications.

7.9 **ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

There are no issues arising from privacy impact assessment

8. **NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None

9. **OPTIONS**

9.1 The options for consideration are:

- Option 1 – Do nothing and continue with two Area Planning Panels
- Option 2 – Amalgamate the Area Planning Panels
- Option 3 – Create a single planning committee dealing with major and minor applications with reduced remit for Regulatory and Appeals Committee

9.2 The Regulatory and Appeals Committee are recommended to follow Option 2 as set out above.

10. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 It is recommended that the Regulatory and Appeals Committee agree to recommend to full Council:

10.1.1 The amalgamation of the Keighley / Shipley and Bradford Area Panels into a single Planning Panel

10.1.2 That the City Solicitor be requested to place this report (if approved) before the Independent Remuneration Panel with a view to a recommendation regarding the Chair's and Deputy Chair's SRA .

10.1.3 That the City Solicitor be asked to draft amendments to the Constitution to implement this decision, including references to the Planning Code of Conduct and the proposed amendments be recommended to the Governance and Audit Committee to then be forwarded to Council for approval.

11. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)