

Title of Report:	Response to Council Motion on the Future of the Planning Policy Task Group
Report to be considered by:	Extraordinary Council
Date of Meeting:	30 October 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	C2916

Purpose of Report: To respond to the Council Motion on the future of the Planning Policy Task Group.

Recommended Action: That the Planning Policy Task Group continues in its current form.

Reason for decision to be taken: To answer the Motion submitted at the September 2014 Council meeting

Other options considered: Changing to a Planning Policy Committee

Key background documentation:

- Council Minutes 18 September 2014

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Strategy priority:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSP2 – Promoting a vibrant district
The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Strategy principle:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSP8 - Doing what's important well

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Hilary Cole - Tel (01635) 248542
E-mail Address:	hcole@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	10 October 2014

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Bryan Lyttle
Job Title:	Planning and Transportation Policy Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 519632
E-mail Address:	blyttle@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy:	N/a
Financial:	There could be additional cost associated with designating a Planning Policy Committee which is currently unbudgeted for. These costs could include an additional Special Responsibility Allowance.
Personnel:	n/a
Legal/Procurement:	n/a
Property:	n/a
Risk Management:	n/a

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes		Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:				
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)				
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only		<input type="checkbox"/>

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is in response to a Council Motion from the meeting on 18 September 2014. This was referred to Planning Policy Task Group and was discussed at a meeting on 26th September 2014, where it was agreed to bring this report to Council in December 2014 or a Special meeting of the Council if appropriate.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 The Motion to Council sought to abolish the Planning Policy Task Group (PPTG) and reconstitute it as a formal Planning Policy Committee. Following the Chairman of the Councils' request the motion was debated at the September meeting of PPTG.
- 2.2 In the opinion of Members, the two key issues raised by the motion to Council concerned; raising public awareness and raising Member awareness in order to alleviate the mistrust felt by the public about how new housing sites had been selected and decisions made and therefore would a change of system resolve these perceived issues.
- 2.3 Members of PPTG debated the issue at length and a non attributable summary is set out in section 7 of the main report.
- 2.4 Following the debate, it was proposed that the Motion to Council be rejected and that the Council be informed of this recommendation.

3. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 3.1 Not relevant to equality.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Members are asked to agree the response to the Motion that is set out in the report.

Executive Report

5. Introduction

- 5.1 This report is in response to a Council Motion from the meeting on 18th September 2014. The Motion relates to changing the status of the Planning Policy Task Group to that of a formal Committee as follows:

“This Council recognises that the developing Local Plan will affect all communities in the district for years to come. In particular, the allocation of sites for housing will have a major impact on both the communities where they are located and on the district at large. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the decisions on where housing is allocated are made in a transparent and democratic way. Although in theory decisions on the Local Plan are made by Full Council, the Planning Policy Task Group is hugely influential in working through the detail and subsequently providing significant input to the Council as to how it should decide such matters. The Planning Policy Task group meets in private and therefore its decisions have not been transparent and will not be transparent in the future if it is continued.

The Council therefore resolves that decisions and recommendations on the Local Plan, including housing site allocations, are resolved and recommended to the Council by a properly constituted, Council appointed, cross party committee that will replace the Planning Policy Task Group. This is so that the new Committee can consider these vital considerations in public, can make formal resolutions and recommendations to the full Council and thus make sure that these decisions are subject to the oversight and scrutiny of the Council process and the public observation that public meetings impose on them”

The Chairman made the following announcement about the motion:

“I propose referring this matter to the next Planning Policy Task Group for a discussion. Because of the decision making timelines associated with the DPD I propose convening a Special meeting of Council in October, should this be necessary, to discuss the Planning Policy Task Group response”.

- 5.2 This report briefly sets out the positives and negatives of turning the Planning Policy Task Group (PPTG) into a Planning Policy Committee, the debate that was heard at September meeting of PPTG and a response to the Council Motion. None of the comments of the Task Group have been attributed to any Member given that meetings are private and therefore the discussion confidential.
- 5.3 Council is asked to consider the report and agree the response to the Motion.

6. Task Group or Committee

- 6.1 Terms of Reference for PPTG were adopted in June 2008 as; to develop, monitor, review and make recommendations relating to planning policy. This means that PPTG is not just limited to plan making but includes policy relating to minerals and waste activities, as well changes to development management.
- 6.2 The advantages associated with the task group approach are considered to be:

- Informal cross party membership with Members being selected for their knowledge of/ interest in planning matters.
- Not covered by Rules of Procedure so presentations can be made to assist Members in their understanding of an issue (for example viability).
- Officers can provide verbal reports of work in progress.
- Reports can be taken as the evidence base and other information emerges through the process.
- Members can talk freely and frankly, oppose national/local party line in the best interests of the residents of West Berkshire.

6.3 However, the disadvantages of the task group approach are considered as:

- Perceived lack of transparency both to other Members of the Council and the general public.

6.4 With regards to the “committee” approach the advantages are considered to be:

- Minutes, meetings and papers will be fully open to the public.
- Minutes and papers will be part of the Local Plan evidence base from the start of the process.
- All Members would know how they reacted to a proposal (support / reject / abstain) would be part of the public record.

6.5 The disadvantages of the committee approach are considered to be:

- Reports to Committee should be put on a forward plan.
- Emerging issues are unlikely to get formally reported. This could create unnecessary public disquiet.
- Members will feel the need to protect their wards rather than take a more strategic view, resulting in decisions of compromise.
- Presentations can only be on what has been submitted as part of the formal report.
- The need for some meetings to be confidential (Part II) by virtue of what is being discussed. The ability to have debate in Part II would be considerably limited given the Schedule associated with the Access to Information Act.

7. Summary of the Debate of the Motion at Planning Policy Task Group

7.1 In the opinion of Members, the two key issues raised by the motion to Council concerned; raising public awareness and raising Member awareness in order to alleviate the mistrust felt by the public about how new housing sites had been selected and decisions made. Although members of the public and press could not participate in committees without the Rules of Procedure being suspended, they could be present to hear the discussions taking place.

- 7.2 Concern was expressed by some Members that while a private meeting allowed Members to have open discussions about policy decisions, given a public audience Members might be inclined to “play to the gallery” and voice political views or take a more narrow approach based on local issues to them.
- 7.3 Members were reminded that by sitting on PPTG, they should be making decisions in a broader capacity and not just as Ward Members. In addition it was incumbent on all task group members to share relevant information with their groups so that all Members became aware of arising issues and also their Town / Parish Councils and residents.
- 7.4 The view was also expressed that private meetings allowed Members to suggest and discuss more radical ideas and if the PPTG was changed to a Committee, then it was likely that the majority of the discussions would be guarded given that the ability to have discussions in Part II would be significantly limited. This would therefore suggest that significant issues would, in future, be discussed only with the Portfolio Holder rather than with a wide range of Members.

8. Response of the Planning Policy Task Group to the Council Motion

- 8.1 After discussing the Motion it was proposed that the motion to Council be rejected. At the vote this proposal was carried.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The recommendation to Council following Planning Policy Task Group is not to adopt the motion.

Appendices

There are no Appendices to this report.

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: N/A

Officers Consulted: Andy Day, Moira Fraser, Gary Lugg and Corporate Board

Trade Union: N/A