

Planning Review Steering Group

Meeting held: 29 November 2021

Attendees: Alderman Fielding, Hillis, Councillors Callan, Dallat O'Driscoll, McGurk, McQuillan, Nicholl, David Jackson, Moira Quinn, Denise Dickson

1. Apologies:
None
2. Declarations of Interest:
None
3. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair/Deputy:
Proposed by Cllr Callan that Cllr McGurk be appointed position of Chair.
Unanimously **agreed**.
Proposed by Cllr McGurk that Cllr Callan be appointed position of Vice Chair
Unanimously **agreed**.
4. Terms of Reference:
D Jackson took Members through the proposed terms of reference for the steering group.
Proposed by Cllr McGurk that the meetings be held bi-monthly.
Seconded by Cllr Callan
Unanimously **agreed**
Date of next meeting to be scheduled for end of January/beginning of February
5. Implementation Plan:
D Dickson took Members through the Planning Review Action Plan.

Legislation and Policies:

Cllr McQuillan queried the timeframe for DAERA consultation responses. D Dickson advised of the frustration of staff and agents regarding delays in receiving consultation responses, further compounded by latest correspondence advising that planning staff can no longer make contact with DAERA to request prioritisation of responses and ask for updates on timeframes for responses. Cllr Nicholl advised that this is also very frustrating for Members. Cllr Hillis stated that this issue should be raised through the Partnership Panel. D Dickson advised that she has written to the DAERA Minister on behalf of Planning Committee and is awaiting response.

Processing:

Cllr McQuillan queried the average processing times for minor applications. D Dickson advised that approx.. 57% of minor applications are being processed within the 15 week statutory target. Cllr Callan stated that he would like to

see the quarterly targets. Cllr McGurk queried if applications were being put to the bottom of the pile when they had missed the statutory target. D Dickson advised that this is not the case and the spreadsheet of decisions issued shows large number of applications issuing beyond the 15 week target. **Action:** D Dickson agreed to circulate list of decisions issued to include processing time for next meeting.

In response to query from Cllr Callan regarding report templates, D Dickson advised that some of the information contained in the delegated reports is auto generated from the system and into the reports; minor changes to the reports for non-contentious minor application largely relate to reducing the repetition of the wording of the planning policy. The comparison in the Review Report was to Planning Appeal Commission Decision Reports. **Action:** D Dickson agreed to bring an example of the template report to next meeting.

*Cllr McQuillan left the meeting at 20:03

In response to queries from Ald Fielding and Cllr McGurk regarding front loading of applications and trust in junior staff, D Dickson advised that this is a key driver going forward and further training for staff will be delivered.

Cllr Callan requested that the senior staff attend this meeting at a future date. **Action:** D Jackson agreed to invite senior staff to a meeting during office hours. He advised that Planning staff have the biggest presence in the office at this time.

Staffing:

In response to queries from Cllrs McGurk and Callan regarding design issues, D Dickson advised that the Scheme of Delegation has been amended to allow refusals based on design to be able to be referred to Planning Committee for determination. Cllr McGurk and Callan agreed that a design arbitrator was still required and the expense and delay would be worth it to resolve the conflicting opinions.

Action: D Jackson advised that we would need to carry out a scoping and costing exercise.

In response to query from Cllr McGurk, D Dickson advised that a stable complement of staff is required to assist in improving performance. She advised that it is difficult to delegate the actions from Action Plan to other staff at this time due to work pressures and the need for her lead on the implementation of the action plan.

Cllr Callan commended staff for taking onboard the Review and the recommendations from it, and the importance of resetting relationships. Cllr Dallat O'Driscoll welcomed the positive attitude and the importance of

everyone moving forward together. Cllr Nicholl stated that it is important as an organisation to provide support to Planning staff.

D Jackson acknowledged the momentum in driving forward the actions from the Review and already starting to see improvements.