

Planning Review Steering Group

Meeting held: 19 October 2022

Attendees: Alderman Fielding, Councillors Callan (vice-chair), Dallat O'Driscoll, McGurk (chair), Nicholl

David Jackson, Denise Dickson

Mr J Mackinnon (external consultant)

1. Apologies:
Moirá Quinn
2. Declarations of Interest:
None
3. Minutes of previous meeting:
Unanimously **agreed**.
4. Implementation Plan:

D Dickson took Members through the updated Planning Review Action Plan (previously circulated).

It was agreed to make changes to the customer survey to include the names of those responding and continue with the Customer Survey. Councillor Callan considered that a newsfeed on results of the survey received would be appropriate at this time to demonstrate that comments submitted were being taken account of.

Mr Mackinnon advised that other senior staff within Planning should take on some of the responsibilities for engagement meetings to relieve some of the pressure. D Dickson advised that she felt it important that as Head of Planning that she fronted these meetings initially. She advised that going forward with the Local Development Plan that she would be assisted at engagement meetings with staff from within this team.

D Dickson advised that due to work pressures the recommendation in relation to awards has not been actioned at this time. Councillor Callan stated that this recommendation should still be progressed. D Jackson advised that he will action this recommendation as part of the awards scheme sponsored by Council through the Chamber of Commerce. Planning can input into the award criteria and the judging panel will be independent from Council's Planning Department. Mr Mackinnon urged progression of the awards recommendation.

D Jackson commended the Planning Department on their performance reported through the recently published Planning Statistical Bulletin by Dfl. This was supported by others present at the meeting.

Councillor Nicholl stated that further engagement is required to encourage economic investment in the Borough. D Dickson stated that the Planning Department as decision-maker needs to keep separate from encouraging those to submit applications and suggested that perhaps this is for the economic development team within Council to attract investment. D Jackson referred to recent meeting he attended and the common theme of a proactive approach to businesses and the need to reduce bureaucracy. He advised that the huge number of environmental designations and objections to applications impact on processing times.

It was acknowledged the pressures on D Dickson at this time and agreed that D Jackson and M Quinn meet with D Dickson after the new Planning Portal system is live to take a stock-take of the planning structures to ensure sufficient support and resources at the grades below D Dickson.

5. AORB:

Councillor McGurk stated that she considered it appropriate to conduct a Planning staff survey to measure the recommendation on empowering junior staff. Councillor Callan stated that culture was one of the issues raised and it is hard to pin down and measure. He considered the survey would give an understanding of the pressure points and how staff could be supported. D Jackson suggested this survey be conducted across all staff in the new year and referred to an audit recommendation. It was agreed to conduct the survey specific to Planning staff in the new year but to commence preparation work with HR in the meantime

Councillor McGurk advised that she considered a stakeholders conference should be conducted on an annual basis to invite a key stakeholder to have discussion on issues. D Dickson advised that this already occurs as part of the annual mandatory training for Planning Committee Members and referred to legal representation this year on Code of Conduct, and previous years where NI Water, SES and NIEA attended.

Councillor McGurk referred a previous action to bring the Planning performance report to CP&R committee. D Dickson advised that this has been actioned and referred to the June meeting where the Annual Report was on the agenda and advised that the Q1 report will be going to November CP&R meeting after it has been presented to the October meeting of the Planning Committee. Councillor McGurk queried if the reason for the quarterly reporting and D Dickson advised that this is due to the performance statistics being published on a quarterly basis by Dfl.

ACTION POINT: Continue with Customer Survey for Planning and issue newsfeed on results so far.

ACTION POINT: Awards scheme to be taken through the Chamber of Commerce Awards.

ACTION POINT: Review support and resources at grade below Head of Planning post go-live of new Planning Portal.

ACTION POINT: Conduct Planning staff survey in new year.

6. Date of Next Meeting: **TBC after consultation with Democratic Services**