

PLANNING COMMITTEE

9 December 2022 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillors Chapman (Chair), Edwards (Vice-Chair), Bower, Chace, Hamilton, Kelly, Lury and Thurston

Apologies: Councillors Blanchard-Cooper, Haywood and Warr

516. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and explained that the meeting had been convened to complete the business of the adjourned meeting on 30 November 2022.

517. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

518. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA WHICH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent items to consider at this meeting.

519. APPEALS

One Member sought clarification over the impact to any of these appeals of the recent Government announcements on greater flexibility for Councils in meeting Government-set housing targets. The Chair explained that the Government was yet to set out the changes in any detail and that it would take time to amend the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and as such these announcements would not affect any of the decisions listed under this item. The Committee then noted the Appeals list.

520. UPDATED PLANNING COMPLIANCE STRATEGY 2022

The Chair opened this item by reminding Members of questions directed to him as part of Public Question Time at Full Council on 9 November 2022 asked on behalf of a number of Parish Councils. He updated Committee that since that meeting he had received two further representations from Parish Councils seeking further delay to this item to allow further consultation. He clarified for the record why he wished for no further delay to the adoption of the compliance strategy as the recommendation was seeking approval 'on the basis that work to monitor and include performance targets specified in the Strategy be initiated', and as such if the Committee decided to approve the strategy at the meeting then the scrutiny work could start and the strategy would become a living document that could be amended on the basis of further representation (including the possibility of amendment via consultation).

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Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Planning Area Team Leader presented the report which set out the outcome of consultations with Parish and Town Councils on the proposed updated Compliance Strategy and sought the Committee's agreement that the strategy be adopted. He provided a verbal update to the strategy [on page 254 of the agenda pack] following representation from Littlehampton Town Council that Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) be moved from the lowest case priority [4] to priority 2, and that this change would be amended in the approved strategy. He noted the work involved in updating the strategy and highlighted the close involvement of enforcement officers, and how it was hoped the updated strategy would engage with the local community and give them confidence that any breaches reported would be investigated in a fit and proper way.

Members then took part in a debate on the item where a number of points were raised, including:

- further support that the strategy update had not been rushed, contrary to some Parish Councils' criticism
- the use of consultants, whether they were clearing the backlog and whether there was a timeline for this or an expected date by which the backlog would be cleared
- the state of the relationship between Parish Councils and Arun given some of the comments made in their representations
- when this strategy and the Planning department's performance would come back to Committee for review
- understanding the need for proactive monitoring of strategic development sites for breaches, but that this was also needed elsewhere in the District on smaller sites (issues with parking in Bersted was noted)
- staffing resource and clarification over the number of enforcement staff currently in post when the report talks about a full complement of 5 enforcement staff
- the recruitment of retired police officers and armed forces personnel to enforcement roles

The Planning Area Team Leader provided Members with responses to the points raised. He noted that there were serious enforcement cases throughout the District, and not just relating to strategic sites, and that any reported breach from priorities 1-3 (less so priority 4) would be looked into as their severity dictated. He clarified that the Council currently only had one enforcement officer and though consultants had been recruited they were not able to get involved in the backlog (built up whilst there were no enforcement resources to investigate complaints) due to the amount of bigger cases also requiring attention. He explained that there was not currently the resource to completely deal with the backlog and that recruitment in the past had not proved successful. New approaches to recruitment were being explored, including seeking to recruit more traditional site-visiting enforcement officers with investigative-type skills, rather than additional planning-trained planning officers, who would perform the inspections and then work with existing planning officers who would undertake a planning assessment.

The Chair noted that changes to pension rules for police officers in 2020 had made it less attractive for them to work for a public authority and had had an impact on their recruitment, and that approaches should be made to retiring armed forces personnel and that this was best done through Councillor Edwards as the Community Military Covenant Champion for Arun. The recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor Chace.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the updated Planning Compliance Strategy 2022 be approved, on the basis that work to monitor and include performance targets specified in the Strategy be initiated within three months of the adoption of this strategy.

521. PLANNING COMMITTEE - PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2

The Chair invited discussion on the report which set out the performance of the Key Performance Indicators at Quarter 2 for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. Members raised a number of points, including:

- following the resolution of the last item, how the Committee would monitor the progress of compliance issues and whether in future data on compliance should be included as a KPI and how this might look
- the KPI range and scope being set by Policy and Finance Committee and whether Planning Committee should formally seek via Committee resolution to incorporate a KPI to enable the Committee to monitor the performance process, and/or in the meantime whether Members should work with Officers to strengthen the robustness of the data in reports already coming to Committee whether they are reported under KPIs or not. The Committee gave the Chair the power to explore this and report back any response.
- downward movement on a number of KPIs (CP26, CP28, CP30, CP35) since the previous report and the reasons for this (staff sickness, absence and recruitment were noted)
- the reactive nature of planning and the skewing impact of the large strategic applications on the metrics if just one target is missed, and frustration when impacts are caused by the applicants and are out of the control of Arun
- the need for an update from Planning Officers on the new announcements from central Government on Government-set housing targets

The Committee then noted the report.

(The meeting concluded at 2.40 pm)