

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMITTEE ON 21 JULY 2021

SUBJECT: Planning Review – update report and future actions

REPORT AUTHOR: Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive
DATE: 7 July 2021
EXTN: 37600
PORTFOLIO AREA: Planning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Hannaby Planning Review was completed in November 2020. The recommendations were split into actions for Members, Officers and both Members and Officers. The Member actions, and the Officer actions, have been dealt with separately. This report brings the recommendations and actions together so that the Planning Committee, and then Full Council, can consider the report and the outcomes as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Planning Committee is requested to:

- (i) Note the Member Recommendations/Action Plan (Appendix C)
- (ii) Note the Officer Recommendations/Action Plan (Appendix B)
- (iii) Approve a virement of £130k (from the Covid-19 catch up reserve) to enable the Officer recommendations from the report to be implemented.
- (iv) Support the need for continued Member training on planning matters, as outlined within the Planning Review (Appendix D)
- (v) Agree that the Planning Review recommendations should be reviewed, by the Planning policy Committee, initially six monthly (if the Recommendations are agreed by Full Council), to satisfy themselves that the actions are being followed through.

The Planning Committee is also requested to recommend that Full Council:

- (vi) Agree the Review's recommendations for the Council (as a whole).

1. BACKGROUND:

1.1 The Planning Review was determined necessary following a variety of issues that arose in various Development Control Committee meetings late 2019. It was agreed

by the (then) four Group Leaders that the Council needed to review how it approached planning as a whole.

- 1.2 It was agreed that the review would focus on **People** (leadership/management, relationships, staff structures and resources), **Performance** (quality, consistency and speed of decision-making), **Procedures** (efficiency and effectiveness) and **the Development Control Committee** itself (relationships, effectiveness, decision-making and procedures).
- 1.3 As part of the review, it was agreed that an Improvement/Action Plan would also be drawn up to identify what improvements were necessary and how to tackle them. A Member and Officer Training Plan was also requested.
- 1.4 In February 2020, Sean Hannaby, of Hannaby Planning Solutions Ltd was appointed to undertake this work. Unfortunately, the Coronavirus has not only slowed progress on this review, but it also hampered the originally intended process. However, a robust process of interviews, observations and desktop analysis fed into the review process, although this took longer due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Written observations by Members also formed part of the review.
- 1.5 The aim of the review was to learn from the experience and advice of an independent expert. The Council may not accept all the findings, but it will need to examine each of the recommendations from the review and consider what approach it wants to take to each of the recommendations.
- 1.6 The final report from Hannaby Planning Solutions Ltd included recommendations and improvement plans. The recommendations were presented to a Members Working Party on 24.11.20. The recommendations and suggested improvements within the report are divided into sections, some for Members only, some for Members and Officers and some for Officers only. The recommendations for Officers are staffing matters which have been progressed by the Chief Executive (in liaison with the Director of Place) as the Constitution gives authority for this. A presentation to officers was made on 1 December 2020.
- 1.7 The Member Working Party, at its meeting on 8 December 2020 considered the Member and joint Member/Officer recommendations within the Planning Review and agreed recommendations to Cabinet on 14 December 2020. At this meeting, the Working Party agreed that a further meeting be scheduled for early February 2021 to discuss measures that would ensure greater consideration of residents' needs and concerns in respect of planning matters (to include communication with the public).
- 1.8 At their meeting on 14 December 2020, Cabinet resolved that:
 - (1) A further meeting of the Planning Review Working Party be convened for February 2021; and
 - (2) That the list of recommendations from the Planning Review Report, as attached to the report as Appendix A, be pursued with the exception of the amendments made at the meeting – being that:

- Recommendation 52 (i) [Amend the 'call-in' procedure to require the planning reason to be agreed by the Director of Place, in consultation with the Chair] be removed along with points 3, 4 and 5, as set out in Appendix A; and
- Recommendation 58 be referred back to the next meeting of the Planning Review Working Party for further consideration.

1.9 At the Cabinet meeting on 14 December 2021, the Working Party recommendations were agreed, with the recommended lines from Recommendation 52 being removed from the table.

1.10 At its meeting on 11 February 2021, the Working Party discussed measures that would ensure greater consideration of residents' needs and concerns in respect of planning matters. As per Cabinet's request, the Working Party also further considered Recommendation 58 'Embrace the opportunity to lead and deliver at strategic level rather than with the sub region'.

1.11 The minutes from the Planning Review Working Party on 11 February 2021 went to Cabinet on 22 March 2021 for approval.

1.12 At their meeting on 22 March 2021, Cabinet resolved that:

- i) the Council should influence developers, in line with planning protocol, to engage more constructively with Parish Councils and the public, utilising Arun District Councillors to help do this;
- ii) the Council should improve its communication with the involvement and training of Parish Councillors;
- iii) Officers investigate the use of digital tools to improve our public engagement;
- iv) Officers consider an online community guide to the planning system (possibly through short videos); and
- v) Cabinet to confirm that it understands that the previous four recommendations may result in resource implications (both people and financial).

1.13 It was also agreed and noted at Cabinet on 22 March 2021 that:

- The Chief Executive explained that Officers were working on recommendations that directly related to Officers from the Planning Review and the intention was to bring together the Member Working Party Recommendations and the Officer Recommendations into one report. It was, therefore, agreed that to enable good coordination on Member and Officer Recommendations, the Working Party should be reconvened when this report was available.
- It was also agreed that there would be a need to review the Planning Review on a regular basis, perhaps six monthly once the Recommendations were agreed.
- Member training was discussed. The ongoing training for Members was a refresh and an update of the summer 2019 training and when completed should be sufficient for Members to sit on Development Control.

1.14 In relation to Officers being given sufficient capacity to progress some of the Officer actions (Appendix B), Members will be aware that the CEO has identified £130k (earmarked in 2020/21 out of the vacancy allowance/ general underspends) to allow this work to be progressed in 2021/22 as quickly as possible.

1.15 Attached to this report are four appendices:

- Appendix A – An Executive Summary of the Planning Review report – please note that names of officers and personal references to Council employees have been redacted.
- Appendix B - the updated position on the Officer Recommendations (which was produced in conjunction with the Planning Review report).
- Appendix C – the updated position on the Member Recommendations (which was produced in conjunction with the Planning Review report).
- Appendix D – Member/Officer Training Plan (which was produced in conjunction with the Planning Review report).

2. PROPOSAL(S):

The Planning Committee is requested to:

- (i) Note the Member Recommendations/Action Plan (Appendix C)
- (ii) Note the Officer Recommendations/Action Plan (Appendix B)
- (iii) Approve a virement of £130k (from the Covid-19 catch up reserve) to enable the Officer recommendations from the report to be implemented.
- (iv) Support the need for continued Member training on planning matters, as outlined within the Planning Review (Appendix D)
- (v) Agree that the Planning Review recommendations should be reviewed, by the Planning policy Committee, initially six monthly (if the Recommendations are agreed by Full Council), to satisfy themselves that the actions are being followed through.

The Planning Committee is also requested to recommend that Full Council:

- (vi) Agree the Review's recommendations for the Council (as a whole).

3. OPTIONS:

- (a) To support the recommendations to Full Council
- (b) To provide alternative recommendations to Full Council

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		X
Relevant District Ward Councillors		X
Other groups/persons (please specify) Planning Review Working Party, Cabinet	X	

5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal (staffing HR implications)	X	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		X
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		X
Sustainability		X
Asset Management/Property/Land		X
Technology		X
Other (please explain)		

6. IMPLICATIONS:

The Planning Review was a Consultant's personal view of how the planning system worked, as a whole, at a particular time (March – September 2020). Many areas of the planning system have already improved as time has progressed. It is important that the Council uses this Review to consider how best to progress matters and take on board proposals that have not yet taken place to improve the planning system, for the public, our partner organisations, Members and Officers.

Funding has been identified to enable officers to progress actions as quickly as possible in 2021 and 2022 (paragraph 1.14 of the report).

Further internal reviews by the Planning Policy Committee will ensure lessons learned are not forgotten. This should also further help to improve the planning service the Council provides to its residents.

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

It is important that the Council is transparent in terms of reviews it completes, to highlight to residents, that the Council is continually trying to improve. Full Council endorsement will ensure recommendations are followed through.

8 EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION: 21 July 2021

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Appendix A - the Planning Review report – please note that names of officers and personal references to Council employees have been redacted.
- Appendix B - the updated position on the Officer Action Plan (which was produced in conjunction with the Planning Review report).

- Appendix C – the updated position on the Member Recommendations (which was produced in conjunction with the Planning Review report).
- Appendix D – Member/Officer Training Plan (which was produced in conjunction with the Planning Review report).