

**PLANNING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP held at ZOOM on THURSDAY,
21 APRIL 2022 at 2.00 pm**

Present: Councillor S Merifield (Chair)
Councillors P Fairhurst, R Freeman, M Lemon and J Loughlin

Officers in attendance: A Lindsell (Democratic Services Officer), P Swarn (Lawyer) and
J Walsh (Planning Transformation Lead)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2022 were approved as accurate.

3 MEMBER TRAINING

The Interim Planning Transformation Lead advised Members that the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) have offered two virtual two hour training sessions on 13 May 2022 at 10am and 2pm. The previously suggested date is no longer possible due to the rescheduling of the June Council meeting.

Members discussed:

- The preference for in-person training for enhanced interaction
- The preference for the trainers to attend in-person
- The possibility of offering hybrid training to encourage participation
- The possibility of holding the training before the Full Council meeting
- The possibility of offering in-person training for Planning Committee members with hybrid training available to other members

The Interim Planning Transformation Lead agreed to ask PAS if they could attend in person for the proposed sessions on 13 May 2022 or on 10 June 2022 to maximise the participation opportunities for Members.

She confirmed that the training is funded by the Government, as a result of the Designation and will be offered to all District Councillors.

The Interim Planning Transformation Lead confirmed that the recommendation in the Constitution is that the Development Manager and the Chair will programme training throughout the year, once the mandatory training has been completed.

RESOLVED: The Interim Planning Transformation Lead agreed to liaise with the Planning Advisory Service regarding training sessions for all Councillors at 10am and 2pm on 13 May 2022 or 10 June 2022. Planning

Committee Members would be required to attend in person, although virtual attendance would be permitted for other Members and the trainers where necessary.

4 **TO VIEW AN EPISODE OF UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL`S PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Interim Planning Transformation Lead explained that the purpose of the proposed viewing was to understand the perspective of the public experience watching the Planning Committee meeting recordings.

The Chair asked Members to consider the customer perspective to identify issues with the hybrid style of meeting which could be reported back to Planning Committee.

Following instruction from the Interim Planning Transformation Lead, the Democratic Services Officer played specific clips from the January 2022 Planning Committee meeting recording and shared her screen so that Members could view the recording.

Members discussed:

- The inadequacy of the quality of the recording
- How difficult it was to identify who was speaking
- Viewers could not see the Chair, The Development Manager or Officers and Members on the top table
- Viewers could not see public speakers in the gallery
- Equipment and technology failures in meetings making the Council look amateurish
- The need for improved hardware and training to use it, selected, installed and run by IT specialists
- The need for prompt action to resolve these issues
- The need for improved seating arrangements

Councillor Freeman noted that he wrote to the Chief Executive regarding the inadequacy of the current audio visual system after a particularly challenging meeting a month ago and has not received a response. He confirmed that he has visited other Councils recently who have excellent sound and audio visual systems. He noted that he had discussed the need for improvements to the acoustics of the Chamber with the Director of Finance and Corporate Services before Covid, but that the improvements remain unactioned.

The Interim Planning Transformation Lead confirmed that following the previous Planning Committee Working Group (PCWG) meeting she had raised concerns with the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and the Acting Assistant Director of ICT and Facilities and asked them to attend this meeting, but that unfortunately they were not available.

She noted that the Chief Executive has said that the previous seating arrangements can be reintroduced from 1 July 2022.

Councillor Fairhurst said that the unavailability of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and the Acting Assistant Director of ICT and Facilities was not acceptable. He noted that the Council are in Designation and the PCWG have identified a serious issue which should be addressed.

The Interim Planning Transformation Lead confirmed that the Director of Finance and Corporate Services had clarified that there had been some previous discussion about alternative equipment.

The Chair confirmed that as Chair of the Planning Committee it was within her remit to write to the Chief Executive and Leader to highlight the concerns raised.

RESOLVED: The Chair agreed to write to the Chief Executive and Leader to highlight the concerns raised regarding the inferior and inadequate quality of the audio visual system within the Chamber.

Councillor Lemon thanked the Interim Planning Transformation Lead for her support of and work with the PCWG.

5 **EQUIPMENT IN THE CHAMBER**

It was agreed that this was covered within the previous agenda item.

6 **FEEDBACK FROM PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Solicitor noted that he had found the recording mostly inaudible and the inaccessibility to residents could have legal connotations.

The Chair thanked the Interim Planning Transformation Lead for her assistance in achieving the amendments voted through at Full Council on 20 April 2022.

7 **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

The next meeting is scheduled for 12 May 2022.

The meeting ended at 15:27.