

Annual Council – 17 May 2023

Written question from Cllr Brading to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Digital Transformation, Housing, Homeless and Poverty.

I was acting as a substitute at the last Planning Committee meeting on the 25th April and was very alarmed and concerned by the discussion during members questions that followed the decision, and the subsequent sharing of voting records. This clearly highlighted what many of us have known for some time – that a vocal minority of Members of the Planning Committee have consistently voted against Officer's recommendations, thereby blocking the delivery of housing on the Island. The right sort of housing is desperately needed by the younger, and less wealthy, members of our communities.

Several of these committee members have also seemed to have ignored the Monitoring officer's advice with regards to predetermination on multiple occasions, behaviour which is in breach of the Isle of Wight Council constitution (Section 13, Code of Practice for Members and Officers Dealing with Planning Matters, Decision Making, page 242). This was highlighted in the recent Planning Service Peer review as causing the IWC reputational damage, and it fundamentally undermines the Local Authority's credibility with the Inspectorate, therefore undermining the DIPS and potentially incurring financial risk via the appeals process.

If delivering housing for Islanders is this Council's number one priority, what actions are you going to take to address this unacceptable and damaging situation?

Response

Thank you for your question Cllr Brading and for highlighting your concerns. In preparing this response I have liaised with my colleague Cllr Fuller, who is the Cabinet member responsible for Planning and Enforcement.

The Planning Committee is, of course, an important committee that acts as a shop window for the council. It plays a crucial role in providing democratic and transparent decisions on sometimes controversial issues.

As I know you'll be aware, the Planning Committee should be determining the planning applications it sees on their own merits and in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Administration recognised its importance by including the committee within the scope of the Peer Review into the Planning Service, which was undertaken by the Local Government Association at the Administration's request.

I am aware that at the last Planning Committee there was a discussion relating to the issues raised in this question, and that the Chair of the Planning Committee was asked to provide information on voting records at a future committee meeting. I would expect that this exercise will facilitate further conversations and reflection from within the Committee, if required, on this issue.