

Planning Committee – 26 July 2022

Written question from Cllr Geoff Brodie to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement

At the Planning Committee meeting of 1 March 2022 it was resolved:

ii. THAT the decision taken at the informal meeting of the Planning Committee on 22nd November 2021 to establish a cross-party working group of Councillors to provide recommendations for revision of the Code of Practice for Members and Officers dealing with Planning Matters for review by the Planning Committee. The working group will fall under the oversight of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Community Engagement be Ratified and endorsed.

iv. THAT Once agreed an amended Code of Practice for Members and Officers Dealing with Planning Matters will be recommended for adoption by Full Council at the earliest opportunity.

Given it is now 5 nearly months later and the recent Peer Review recommended an urgent review to effectively deliver the council's democratic function, can the Committee have an update on the progress of this democratically agreed review?

Response

As Councillors may be aware Full Council, at the annual meeting on 18 May 2022, agreed that the Audit Committee was the appropriate route for leading on the work on the review of the Constitution, which includes the Planning Code of Practice. This was further discussed by the Audit Committee at its meeting yesterday and they agreed the overall approach, not the detail, to this review which is that:

“the review of the current constitution be undertaken within the established remit, to be led by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Audit Committee, with engagement of councillors to ensure relevant input”.

As such I understand there is a lot still to be established by the Monitoring Officer and Audit Committee chair in terms of what the detail of the process looks like. There is the commitment in para 17 of the report to the Audit Committee that “the existing constitution is to be reviewed, involving councillors and officers” (my emphasis added) and at this early stage we don't know what that looks like.

I will be speaking to the MO and the Chair of the Audit Committee to give them my views on how this should be approached, and share the information we have so far collected thinking about the Peer Review recommendations and actions. I am aware that the intention is for the Review of the Constitution will be a standing item for the Audit Committee, who next sit on 26 September.

It makes sense to me for us not to duplicate work and energy, and to keep the approach as simple as possible. I know there has previously been the suggestion of a Councillor Planning Protocols Working Group, but my understanding (as per the references in the question) is that the group has not to date been formally established and remit agreed by Planning Committee. As such I think working through the wider

Constitution review process makes sense and avoids unnecessary duplication of work, time and effort.

I would like to make it very clear that my expectation is that all members of the Planning Committee will have the opportunity to input into this process, be that in a formal or informal process. As already mentioned I will be speaking to the MO and the Chair of the Audit Committee and confirming my involvement, as Cabinet Member, in this process.