

Maldens & Coombe Neighbourhood Committee - 20 March 2019
Surbiton Neighbourhood Committee - 20 March 2019
Kingston Town Neighbourhood Committee - 27 March 2019
South of the Borough Neighbourhood Committee - 27 March 2019

Neighbourhood Working Arrangements

Report by Director, Corporate & Commercial

Purpose

To provide the Committee with the opportunity to consider the way in which it wishes to utilise some of the new powers and flexibilities available to it in its working arrangements.

Recommendation that -

Consideration be given to whether:

1. a Sub-Committee should be established to consider planning and related issues within its remit and, if so,
 - (a) the membership of the Sub Committee be decided on the basis of either all Members or one or two Members from each Ward on a rotational basis; and
 - (b) the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee be appointed for the 2019/20 Municipal Year
2. a 'guillotine' should be applied to meetings of the Committee (subject to the ability of the Committee to waive the guillotine by resolution when necessary) and, if so, at what time it should be applied.

Key Points

- A. The Council is committed to improving engagement with local communities and ensuring that decision making better reflects local priorities, issues, challenges and need. Over the course of the summer and autumn of 2018 a review of the Neighbourhood Committee arrangements was therefore undertaken with a view to ensuring that they have the powers and resources to help achieve the Council's aspirations.
- B. The outcome of this review was reported to Council on 11 December 2018, at which point a number of changes to the roles and functions of the Neighbourhood Committees were agreed as part of a wider package of governance improvements. This has opened the way for the adoption of a variety of new working arrangements and the following report presents the Committee with the opportunity to consider a number of these, namely whether it wishes to:
 - establish a separate Sub-Committee specifically to determine Planning applications and planning enforcement matters;
 - collectively pool Members ward funding budgets in order to support local projects and initiatives; and
 - set a cut off point (a 'guillotine') by which time formal meetings of the Committee should be concluded

Planning Sub-Committee

1. Feedback from Members during the course of the review highlighted the substantial proportion of each meeting which in most, though not all, Neighbourhoods, is usually devoted to the consideration of planning applications. It was emphasised that there is a need to examine the way in which planning applications are dealt with in order to ensure that Committees have the capacity to manage their newly extended decision making and engagement remits.
2. It was therefore agreed by Council that each Neighbourhood Committee should have the flexibility to opt to establish a planning sub committee to deal with planning decisions separately to other business should it so wish. This will not only have the advantage of creating space for the consideration of different types of business at the main Committee meetings but will also remove the confusion that can sometimes occur amongst members of the public when the different public speaking and engagement processes which relate to planning and non planning items are utilised in the same meeting. It will also reduce the inconvenience to residents attending meetings in the public gallery who presently often have to wait for considerable periods of time before any non-planning matters in which they may be interested are considered.
3. The Committee is thus asked to consider if it wishes to establish a Sub-Committee specifically to deal with planning applications and planning enforcement matters within its terms of reference. Dates have already been set aside in the Calendar of meetings for the 2019/20 Municipal Year in order to accommodate the necessary meetings for this Committee as follows:

Kingston Town	
Neighbourhood	Planning Sub
4 June	
	16 July
5 Sept	
	18 Sept
5 Nov	
	3 Dec
16 Jan	
	12 Feb
8 March	
	21 April

4. If the Committee is minded to establish a Sub-Committee it will also need to agree its membership and appoint a Chair. It is recommended that the Sub-Committee should consist of either one or two Members per ward. This would ensure that there was always at a minimum one Ward Member who was not on the Sub-Committee and therefore free to represent residents views in a manner not available to those subject to the usual Planning Protocol restrictions around bias and predetermination. Membership could be on a rotational basis if this was so desired in order to minimise the additional meeting burden on individual Members.

Meetings 'Guillotine'

5. If the determination of planning applications is removed from business meetings of Committees this creates the opportunity to place a limit on the length of each meeting. The Committee could, if it so wishes, introduce a 'guillotine' which would automatically end debate at a set time. If business remains to be transacted at that time it stands deferred to the next meeting, though the Committee would always retain the ability to agree, by resolution, to extend the length of the meeting if it felt there were particularly good reasons for doing so.
6. While such provisions have not typically been used in Kingston they are common in many local authorities. An earlier finish to meetings can help to focus and concentrate debate, reduce inconvenience to residents in the public gallery waiting for a specific item and assist Members with family and caring responsibilities, thereby helping to ensure that the membership of the Council can properly reflect the communities it represents. It may also enable a greater range of venues to be considered for each meeting because many community halls and schools which may otherwise be suitable to host Neighbourhood meetings are unable to do so due to restrictions on finish times.
7. No guillotine can be applied to any meetings at which planning applications are considered because of the risk of challenge if any debate on an application was ended prematurely before all the relevant matters had been taken into consideration.
8. The Committee is therefore asked to consider whether it wishes to apply a 'guillotine' to meetings and, if so, at what time that should be applied.

Resource Implications

9. Provision for the additional costs associated with the establishment of Planning Sub-Committees, both in respect of the staffing of additional meetings by the Democratic Services team and the hire of external venues and audio facilities (where required) was included within the 2019/20 Budget approved by Council at its meeting on 26 February.

Background papers - None

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