Planning Peer Review recommendations

Live working draft Action Plan v1

Theme	Recommendation	Context	What will good look like?	Proposed actions	Owner	By when
Cross-party working	**Develop closer cross-party working on the issues and solutions highlighted in this review (R1)**	The finely balanced political position of the authority and the non-political role of planning has allowed issues around behaviour and culture to develop and go unchallenged	There is a collective appreciation of each other's roles and responsibilities A closer, more open and aware working relationship is created which will rebuild trust, confidence, and professional respect from both sides Planning's Core Purpose is clearly communicated, understood and owned across the Council and understood by the communities, partners and other key stakeholders	Establish Cross Party Steering Group to work on Recommendations *[Done]* Discuss the pertinent elements of the review with Babergh's Planning Cabinet Member, for instance whether a joint Planning Charter is adopted. Determine the resources required to deliver the action plan, including the cost of external consultants, to deliver training Agree the timescales for review and how actions will be monitored.	Cabinet Member, AD Planning, AD Law and Governance, Chief Planning Officer (CPO)	Short term

| Building trust | Build a closer, more open and aware working relationship between officers and committee members through an ongoing programme of joint training for officers and members (R2) | Officers and members need to acknowledge issues around behaviour and culture and work collectively together to address them. | Trust, confidence, and professional respect from both sides of the key relationship is developed and maintained

Respectful challenge and questioning are inherent and healthy parts of the democratic process but the excessive and sometimes aggressive questioning and challenge of internal and external officers during the committee discontinues

There is improved recognition and understanding of both officers and members roles and this does not shy away from the reality of the finely balanced political situation | Produce a two year Councillor and Officer development plan, to include formal training, roundtable discussions and shadowing opportunities, with a three month review mechanism built in.

Ensure connection with existing corporate Member Development Programme.

Work with Group leaders to encourage attendance at training

Ongoing Monitoring participation and outcomes including members satisfaction | CPO, CM Democratic Services, Chairs of Planning Committee, Cabinet Member for Planning, cross party working group, Member Development Working Group | Short term |
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| Building trust | **Actively promote the earlier engagement of committee members with case officers on issues and requests for information (R3)** | Early engagement with case officers for questions and technical information for the committee, lobbying and engagement with applicants and site visit protocols are not universally being followed. | The opportunity is created for committee members to add value early in the process, to raise questions for clarification, highlight questions that will be raised at committee

Case officers can better support the committee members to make good decisions by having relevant information available.

More trusting relationships are created, risks can be identified early and strategies can be agreed to determine cases on time. | Encourage Committee members to raise questions by email ahead of briefing and include in development plan addressing R2.

Committee Chairs and the Chief Planning Officer will champion the model and review its effectiveness.

Member and Officer training is developed around this issue.

Provide clarity about the level of involvement that committee members may have with developers at pre-application and application stage including ensuring adherence to site visit protocols. | CPO, Chairs of Committee, Cabinet member for Planning, cross party working group. | Short term |

Building trust	Shorten the length of time that the committee sits (R4) *Note: Possibly merge R4 and R6 as they go hand in hand although have been kept separate here to aid transparency.*	The committee is presently not a great "shop window" to decision making, Committee meetings are significantly too long and this is not best practice.	Improved clarity of processes, shortened presentations and focused technical questioning which will improve team productivity as well as protect and enhance the Councils reputation on how they make important decisions. The number of applications deferred are reduced.	Review the scheme of delegation cross-party to ensure the right balance between delegated officer decisions and those requiring Committee approval Develop and embed new officer protocols for report writing and presentations (see R6). Consider revised Committee arrangements, including a time limit on speakers, a new format of recommendations and a maximum limit for committees to run.	CPO, Committee Services, cross party working group	Short term

| Cross-party working | Strengthen the recognition that decision making at committee is not political (R5) | Political or ideological debate is evident in many planning applications that are reported to planning committees, it cannot become and look like decisions have a political bias | Decision-making is seen to be made in the wider public interest. Applications are considered openly, impartially, with sound judgement and for justifiable reasons against the council's adopted policies. | A Corporate training programme for all councillors and relevant officers to be developed. Its focus will be to create a clear understanding of each other's roles and shared formal and informal learning and training, in particular probity and non-political decision making. This training should include practical examples of what is and isn't acceptable.

Access LGA support to help scope and deliver the training. | AD Planning, CPO, CM Governance. | Short term |
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| Building trust | Simplify presentations at committee and shorten reports (R6) | A more consistent approach is required on how cases are reported and presented to Committee with a greater emphasis that papers are more succinct.

Furthermore, some committee members are not reading these extensive committee papers prior to the committee and relying instead on the detailed officer presentations to inform them of the information to be able to undertake decisions | Shorter reports and presentations, digital committee papers and reduced committee times will free up more time and staff resources

The information can be presented to make it more accessible to members of the public. | Develop bespoke training for officers, focused on report writing principals that all reports must not be too long, elaborate or defensive (also links to R4).

Develop consistent approach to presentations, recognising that some diversity is ok and that allows for differing officer approaches but within certain parameters.

Implement new protocols, including a summary of consultee comments and background information slides in the background if needed | CPO, Comms Business Partner, Member working group | Short term |
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| Cross-party working | Embrace a more modern/digital approach to the committee papers (R7) | The committees' requirement for these extensive papers to be produced principally in a hard copy form, as an outlier to the rest of the Council that has embraced a digital agenda, requires a lot of resourcing in time and money by the authority. | The move to digital committee papers will free up more time and staff resources | Design and implement a new digital approach with Councillors

Look creatively at IT opportunities, including the ability to view more than one document at the same time in the meeting and whether planning committee members should have iPads for use at Committee site visits and to cross reference between papers in meetings.

Undertake hybrid trial with known IT literate stakeholders, evaluate and agree roll out. | CPO, committee services | Short term |
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Cross-party working	Remove the Referral Committee (R8)	There is also a high volume of applications being seen at the committees of which many have no strategic planning reason or even a basic planning reason to be discussed. This is also extending the time the committee is sitting for along with the detailed presentations and questioning.	No use of a Referrals committee as decisions are effectively made by either Committee A or B.	Trial a risk assessment approach to cases with consensus across groups to this approach. Leave PRC in place pending results of trial. Subject to above, make changes to both the Council's Constitution and Planning Charter. Share and consult with SLT and Cabinet before implementing changes.	AD Law and Governance, AD Planning, Cabinet Member for Planning.	Long term
Cross-party working	Tighten the committee "call in" requirement (R9)	Some individuals are not aware of the 'call in' requirement to committee. Furthermore, the process is not clear and transparent and there appears to be a lack of consistency in how it is applied.	The process for requesting a "call in" is more accessible, easier to understand, and is applied consistently.	Officers to produce an options paper using examples from elsewhere. Keep the "call-in" requirement under regular review until the profile of applications return to pre pandemic levels and any other changes to the committee process are embedded Process needs to be improved, clearer, applied consistently, with a	AD Planning, CPO	Medium term

				requirement to have discussed the proposal with the Area Manager. When new process adopted, ensure training for Councillors and Officers, including "when is the right time to call-in".		
Community engagement	**Build on the welcome support already delivered to Town and Parish Councils (R10)**	Improved Parish information and training sessions will aid their understanding and engagement with both planning policy and decision making. It will also help the Councils officers to better understand and inform Neighbourhood Plan making.	The shared planning narrative is understood and owned across the Council and its communities. Our communities are aware of our future plans and have the chance to influence the outcomes that matter. The opportunity for joint training allows them to help plan for change, to share key information and support effective decision making.	Programme of community engagement with both parish councils and neighbourhood plan groups. Engagement around emerging neighbourhood plans and decision taking on made neighbourhood plans. Develop an ongoing wider training programme with Parish Councils in association with SALC.	CPO, CM Strategic Planning, CM Communities, SALC	Medium term
Cross-party working	**Update the Council's Planning Charter. (R11)**	Some of the good practice guidance set out in the Charter are not being followed,	The Planning Charter offers precision and clarity of purpose which also drives behavioural change.	The Cross Party Working Group implement the changes highlighted in the Peer Review to build ownership of the Charter.	AD Planning, CPO, Monitoring Officer, Committee	Medium term

		particularly around the early engagement with case officers and adherence by all members. It is also considerably out of date. .	Following the practices identified in the Planning Charter.	A two-yearly review of a sample of previous decisions is undertaken and any new recommendations be reported into Development Control Committees. The Planning Charter should include role descriptions and restrictions for each of the participants in the planning process – eg. Committee member, ward member, applicant etc That work in developing the Charter and related processes be built into the training programme under R2.	Services, cross party working group.	