

Decision Session
Cabinet Member for City and Environmental Services
Report of the Assistant Director
(City Development and Sustainability)

Summary

1. This report examines in more detail the recommendations as set out at paragraphs 5 and 6 of the cover report (Annex A) from the E-Planning Facilities Review conducted by the Task Group of the Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It asks the Cabinet Member to endorse the implementation of recommendations arising from the review to allow the roll out of electronic consultation with Parish Councils and Planning Panels (PCs and PPs), whilst taking into account the impact of the change on those consultees.

Background

2. The Cabinet report of 4th December 2012 sets out how the Council was obliged to introduce electronic working for dealing with planning proposals. The Council has been working to minimise printing costs and reduce the time taken to distribute consultations and PCs and PPs are now the only external consultees to still receive paper copies (although a number are already receiving e-consultations). Over the last few years various events and consultations have taken place to assess the readiness of this consultee group to receive electronic consultation in relation to new planning applications. Applicants no longer have to submit paper copies of applications, and such applications have to be printed off to make them available in paper format for consultees. Currently over 40% of applications to City of York Council are received electronically.
3. A significant factor in this decision is the Authority's move to West Offices, where there is limited storage space available and new

working practices include 'hot desking' and a paperless environment.

4. The Task Group investigation included submissions from relevant officers and from representatives of PCs and PPs both in writing and at meetings.
5. The Task Group produced a series of recommendations following the review and presented these to the Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Each of the recommendations as subsequently agreed by the Committee and considered by Cabinet, is assessed in detail as below.

Analysis of Scrutiny Committee of Recommendations

i. That City of York Council officers provide a comprehensive training course for Parish Councils and Planning Panels on E-Planning facilities before March 2013; (initially offering sessions at different times and thereafter a minimum of once a year)

6. Once the recommendations are confirmed for action, officers from Development Management and Support teams would be able to provide appropriate training for PCs and PPs on the use and capability of e planning facilities. The implementation of e-consultation has not formally commenced as yet and as such there is currently no disadvantage to PCs and PPs arising. Whilst there are concerns over the time required to prepare and present the training material to the consultees given the resource constraints and workload pressures, such time could be viewed as a worthwhile investment in that it will minimise the number of queries and requests for assistance received from PCs and PPs on an individual basis once the e-consultation programme is implemented. It is envisaged that 2 sessions would be held within West Offices to demonstrate how e-consultations will be sent, how details can be viewed and shared on line, how documents can be downloaded for viewing offline and how applications can be displayed in meetings when they are being considered.

ii. That City of York Council provides a named officer that Parish Councils and Planning Panels can contact if they have any questions about using E-Planning facilities. Similarly that Parish Councils and Planning Panels have a named person for officers to contact by e-mail

7. This can readily be provided, and is most appropriately the Specialist Developments and Building Control Support Officer (Development Management Lead) in the Support Services team. Officers can collate a list of contact names gathered from the PCs and PPs.

iii. That the Head of Development Management, in conjunction with this Task Group, one Planning Panel representative and one Parish Council representative, develop a good practice guide which once completed be:

- Reviewed annually
- Circulated to all Parish Council and Planning Panel Clerks
- Made available on City of York Council's website

8. The guide can be developed, in conjunction with the parties involved and other specialist officers within the Council. No time frame has been set for production of the guide; however if the e-consultation programme is to be implemented quickly to achieve the cost and time efficiency savings required, a short time frame would need to be set for the completion of this work. It is suggested that the guide be completed by the end of April 2013.

iv. That a room within West Offices and/or in local libraries be made available (within advertised opening hours) for use by Parish Councils and Planning Panels if they wish to use it and any room to offer audio visual equipment for their use (and where possible a laptop).

9. The Facilities Management Team will be responsible for the booking and fee arrangements for rooms within West Offices. These arrangements are still under formulation, but will be implemented once the Customer Centre opens towards the end of March. The Task Group recommendation will be considered in formulating the protocol, as it is appreciated that Planning Panels do not hold a budget. The Facilities Management Team advises it will ensure that it can provide these facilities. The facilitation of such meetings by officers and the holding of meetings during office opening hours would further help to ensure that costs were minimised. The Head of Libraries, Information and Archives has advised that proposals are being considered for the possible of transfer libraries and archives into a social enterprise, operating as an independent organisation. The possibilities to generate income would include

room hire, such that spaces/rooms would unlikely to be offered free of charge. However work with Parish Councils to find solutions would continue.

v. That the option to request a paper copy of plans for larger applications remain (a set of criteria to be produced by the Head of Development Management against which a request will be judged).

- 10 For ease of use it was anticipated that documents in excess of 20 pages in length would be made available on request in paper form. Such documents normally accompany larger or more complex applications, where the applicant provides or is willing to provide multiple copies to ensure quicker registration, avoiding the Council having to print copies of documents once the applications has been submitted. Larger files can be made available for collection from the Council offices or delivered to the PCs and PPS.

vi. That officers continue to explore with IDOX the possibility of Providing the function to download all documents associated with a single planning application as one PDF file. An update on how this is progressing to be provided to Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee three months after these recommendations have been approved by Cabinet and thereafter on a six-monthly basis until this has been resolved.

- 11 The matter was first raised and discussed with the software supplier IDOX in the autumn, following one of the Task Force meetings with PC and PPS at which the possibility was raised. IDOX has advised that it does not provide such functionality at present and that it would require extensive reprogramming to provide this facility. However, a solution has now been identified at a local level which would allow officers within the support team on registering applications to manually collate electronic documents into one file or two if a single file size is excessive. This process would add to the workload of the small and busy team to some extent, but would provide a solution to overcome the issue raised by PCs and PPs of having to download each separate file document from the Public Access system.

vii. That the Communities and Equalities Team ask those Parish Councils which are currently successfully using E-

Planning to offer demonstrations to other Parish Councils and Planning Panels as to how to ‘get the best out of E-Planning’ or to invite others to attend their meetings to view how E-Planning facilities can be used effectively.

- 12 The Communities and Equalities Team has agreed to work with PCs to facilitate demonstrations by the PCs and PPs actively engaged in e-planning. The Team also suggests it would be worthwhile considering combining these sessions with the suggested technical planning training from officers.

viii. That the Communities and Equalities Team liaise with the Yorkshire Local Council’s Association to resolve outstanding issues brought to their attention.

- 13 The Team attends the York Local Council’s Association meetings to monitor communication and the relationship between the local authority and local councils and act as a forum to explore/resolve outstanding issues. This then feeds back to the Yorkshire association regarding issues arising from York or from the wider area.

ix. That the Administration and Business Support Manager ensures that all plans uploaded on to the E-Planning system have a good enough line density to enable them to be clearly viewed

- 14 Images scanned onto the IDOX system, then available to view via the Public Access on line system are now copied at a resolution that allows for clear inspection at even at well over 100% size.

x. That the Administration and Business Support Manager reviews the processes and timescales for uploading additional documentation received in relation to planning applications to ensure that all information is uploaded onto the Public Access Website within a reasonable timeframe.

- 15 Concerns by the consultee group were raised last year at time when there were both staff resourcing issues within the support scanning team and technical difficulties with the scanning and indexing of documents. These issues have been resolved such that newly received additional documents are currently being uploaded usually on the day of receipt or certainly within 24 hours.

xi. That the Head of Commissioning, Design and Facilities and the Head of Libraries, Information and Archives explore ways of potentially offering rooms for use in both West Offices and local libraries at minimum cost to Parish Councils and Planning Panels.

- 16 See paragraph 9 above. At least as an interim measure booking and facilitation of the meetings in West Offices would minimise costs for Panels using West Offices.

xii That the Monitoring Officer investigate the Constitutional status of Planning Panels and report back to Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the end of the 2012/13 municipal year on:

- **What authority, if any, the Council has in relation to Planning Panels**
- **What support, if any, City of York Council should give to Planning Panels**
- **If Planning Panels do remain, then to look at ways they can work in a more transparent and accountable way (e.g. published membership, transparent and public meetings, public agendas and minutes and declarations of interest)**

- 17 This recommendation to clarify the status and role of Planning Panels and the Council's support to them can be implemented; however the report back to the Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee would not take place before the end of the Municipal year given the time required to investigate, consider options and formulate the report.

Options

- 18 A) That the Cabinet Member approves the proposed recommendations arising from the scrutiny review and the suggested methods of implementation as set out above.
- B) That the Cabinet Member rejects the proposed recommendations arising from the scrutiny review.

C) That the Cabinet Member approves or rejects the proposed recommendation arising from the scrutiny review as considered appropriate in each case.

Council Plan 2011 - 2015

- 19 E-planning facilities including the 'Public Access' on-line application system are used widely by members of the public, PCs and PPS. The Building Strong Communities priority in the Council Plan has a commitment to community engagement, stating that 'we will introduce new ways for residents to interact with the Council using new technologies and improving communications'

Implications

- 20 **Financial:** In relation to recommendation (iv), if rooms were to be made available to the public and bodies such as PPs and PCs there would be some staffing implications in relation to managing access, in particular (more so if rooms were to eventually be made available outside of core working hours). Any charge would need to take this issue into consideration.
- 21 **Human Resources:** There are no known human resource implications associated with the recommendations in this report.
- 22 **Legal:** There are no legal implications associated with the recommendations arising from this report.
- 23 **Other Implications:** There are no other known implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

Risk Management

- 24 There are no known risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

Recommendations

- 25 (i) That option A be accepted i.e. that the Cabinet Member approves the proposed recommendations arising from the scrutiny review and the suggested methods of implementation as set out above.

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report:

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Report
Approved

Date *Insert Date*

Chief Officer's name
Title

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Annex A Report of the Chair of the E- Planning Facilities Scrutiny
Review Task Group to Cabinet of 4th December 2012