

Report to: Members' Code of Conduct Committee

From: Monitoring Officer

Meeting: 27 November 2019

Possible Amendments to the Planning Code

At your meeting on 24 September 2019 there was a discussion on the possible amendments required to the Planning Code.

It was decided:

The Head of Corporate Governance advised members that it was an opportune time to review the Planning Code as a number of training events had been held in recent months giving members the opportunity to consider the Code in tandem with the Planning Committee meetings.

After discussion it was agreed that consideration should be given to:

1. Clarify the wording about who can call in a planning application. It was felt that a councillor should only be able to call in an application for their own ward.
2. Provide a definition for the term 'wider public interest'. It was generally agreed that it should be something that would be relevant or appropriate to a specific part of the community, potentially even as small as a road.
3. Members also asked if there could be additional information added regarding 'very special circumstances' as this was a contentious issue.
4. Paragraph 27d to be amended to state that in exceptional circumstances a call-in could be made by phone and then followed up by email.

The Committee discussed concerns about the conduct of members at Planning Committee who had been seen using electronic devices to look at non-planning material or to communicate with other councillors during the meeting which was unacceptable.

Another issue raised was those who voted contrary to the officer's recommendation without expressing any view at all during the debate. This created an impression that they voted following a party line. It was emphasised that any councillor who did have concerns about a planning application should contact the relevant officer to discuss those.

The Committee requested the Head of Corporate Governance to investigate planning training and the possibility of webinars instead of, or in addition to, on-site seminars.

Resolved that the Head of Corporate Governance liaise with the Planning Development Manager and report back to the next meeting with proposed changes to the code and details of call-ins.

A track change document is now submitted to examine and discuss these matters further.