

LOCAL PLAN MEMBER WORKING GROUP

Head of Service:	Viv Evans, Head of Planning
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 – Draft terms of reference for Local Plan Member Working Group

Summary

This report concerns the establishment of an informal cross-party Local Plan Member Working Group to advise the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on planning policy matters.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) **Agree to establish an informal cross-party Local Plan Member Working Group to advise the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on planning policy matters; and**
- (ii) **Agree the draft terms of reference for the Local Plan Member Working Group**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The creation of a Member Working Group can be expected to support Local Plan progression and reduce the likelihood of fundamental changes to the Plan's spatial strategy or challenges further down the line.

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2 Background

- 2.1 Consultants on behalf of the government's Planning Advisory Service (PAS) recently conducted a 'Local Plan Gateway Review' of the Epsom & Ewell Local Plan. This Gateway Review considered the challenges and opportunities that the Council is currently facing in progressing its Local Plan with the aim of meeting the government's target that all local planning authorities should have an up-to-date plan in place by the end of 2023. PAS submitted an advice note on 26 May 2021 to provide a summary of the findings from the Gateway Review and some recommended next steps.
- 2.2 The PAS advice note observed that the Council does not have a councillor Local Plan advisory group or working group of any kind. It therefore recommended that consideration should be given to establishing a cross-party Local Plan councillors' working group in an advisory rather than a decision-making capacity. Officers consider that there would be merit in setting up such a working group as it would (1) provide them with an informal and discrete sounding board to assist in the development of the Local Plan and (2) be able to advise the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on specific topic areas relevant to the Plan.
- 2.3 Officers recommend that the working group should be cross-party but informal, and that it should act as a sounding board for the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee. Paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9 of Part 3 of the Constitution state that, in addition to the main committees and sub-committees, the Council may set up time-limited sub-committees for specific purposes. Committees may also appoint sub-committees and working groups, and if appropriate agree their terms of reference, a chairman and, if considered necessary, a vice chairman and substitute members of the sub-committee or working group.
- 2.4 Any working group will only have advisory functions and Licencing & Planning Policy will remain the decision-making Committee.
- 2.5 Suggested terms of reference to be adopted for the Working Group are set out at **Appendix 1**.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Impact Assessment

- 3.1.1 The use of governance structures such as the Member Working Group which is proposed may support Local Plan progression and reduce the likelihood of fundamental changes to the Plan's spatial strategy or challenges further down the line.

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3.1.2 Whilst it is recommended that the working group be established on an informal basis, this would not be without risk. These risks include:

- There may be suspicion of the purpose of the working group from outside the Council because discussions would not be conducted in an open and transparent manner.
- This may generate Freedom of Information requests being submitted by anyone interested in the topic areas discussed by the working group.
- There would be no formal minutes of the meetings so no record of what was being debated or agreed.
- There would still be a need for agreement of members of the working group to abide by 'Chatham House' rules, so as not to stifle full and frank discussion.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 None arising from this report.

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 None arising from this report.

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None arising from this report.

3.5 Other

3.5.1 None arising from this report.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 The modest additional cost of administering the Member Working Group could be borne by existing budgets. The working group meetings may to some extent reduce the frequency of Licensing and Planning Policy Committee meetings.

4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents form this report.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

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5.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

Effective Council

6.2 The new Local Plan will contribute towards delivering the Council's Visions and objectives identified in its Four Year Plan.

6.3 **Service Plans:** Plan-making is a matter included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.4 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** The Local Plan itself will have a key role in implementing a number of key objectives that are set out in the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.

6.5 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None arising from this report.

6.6 **Partnerships:** None arising from this report.

7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- None

Other papers:

- Planning Advisory Service – Local Plan Gateway Review Summary Advice Note – Epsom and Ewell Local Plan, 26 May 2021