

## **PROPOSED REFORM OF PLANNING COMMITTEES: TECHNICAL CONSULTATION**

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<b>Report Author</b>	Justin Turvey
<b>Wards affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Urgent Decision?</b>	No
<b>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</b>	
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	Appendix 1 - Analysis and recommended responses from Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

### **Summary**

The government has launched a consultation on the reform of Planning Committees, which opened for comments on 28th May 2025.

The key areas the consultation is seeking views on are:

- introducing a national scheme of delegation so there is greater consistency and certainty about which decisions go to committee;
- introducing rules regarding the size and composition of planning committees; and
- introducing a requirement for mandatory training for all planning committee members so they are more informed about key planning principles.

### **Recommendation (s)**

**The Committee is asked to:**

- (1) Note the contents of the consultation**
- (2) Approve the draft response (Appendix 1) or;**
- (3) Agree amendments and nominate and authorise the Head of Place Development, in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, to finalise and submit the response**

# Licensing and Planning Policy Committee

## 3 July 2025

### 1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The consultation on the reform of Planning Committees opened for comments on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2025 and will close on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025.
- 1.2 If reforms are fully, or even partly, implemented as per the consultation, the proposed changes to how Planning Committees function will have significant implications for how planning decisions are made at a local level. It is therefore important that the Council make its views known to the Government on these matters by submitting a formal response to the consultation.

### 2 Background

- 2.1 The Government launched a consultation on changes to how Planning Committees function on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2025. It is open for responses from anyone (individuals and groups) until 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025. The consultation follows last year's election of the new Government, who made a number of commitments around removing barriers to development, including a pledge to build 1.5 million homes during this Parliament.
- 2.2 The consultation acknowledges that planning decisions are principally made locally, and states that the government recognises that planning committees have an 'integral role in providing local democratic oversight of planning decisions'. However, the consultation says it is vital that 'planning committees operate as effectively as possible, focusing on those applications which require member input and not revisiting the same decisions'.
- 2.3 The consultation is considering three main actions to reform planning committees nationally:
  - introducing a national scheme of delegation so there is greater consistency and certainty about which decisions go to committee;
  - requiring separate, smaller committees for strategic development so there is more professional consideration of key developments as well as limiting the size of committees; and
  - introducing a requirement for mandatory training for all planning committee members so they are more informed about key planning principles.
- The consultation also considers a fourth area around the quality of decisions – changing how Councils are measured in terms of quality of decision making (the number of decisions which are subsequently overturned at appeal).

# Licensing and Planning Policy Committee

## 3 July 2025

- 2.4 In terms of any implications for Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Planning Committee, officers have reviewed the applications considered by committee over 2024-25 against the measures set out in the consultation to help guide the Council's response. 25 applications were considered by the Council's Planning Committee over that 12-month period, of which:
- 7 applications were 'Major' applications. Some of these would have been subject to a 'triage' discussion between the Chair of Planning Committee and Head of Place Development to decide if they should be considered by Planning Committee as outlined in Appendix 1.
  - 10 applications were submitted by the Council and would be unaffected by the changes.
  - 8 applications were smaller applications (generally 'Minor' applications for up to ten residential units) called in by Members. These would be affected by the changes i.e. they would have been delegated for determination by planning officers rather than determined at planning committee. Of the 8 applications, 1 was a Member overturn (i.e. officer recommendation for approval but Planning Committee refused the application) which was subsequently dismissed at appeal and 7 were items where Planning Committee agreed with the officer recommendation.
- 2.5 Although it is not yet clear which of the proposed changes the government will make, were the proposals to be implemented in full, then none of those 8 called in applications would be considered by Planning Committee, reducing the overall number of items by at least 30% and potentially resulting in the cancellation of some meetings.

### 3 Risk Assessment

#### Legal or other duties

##### 3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1.1 Whilst the reforms will have a wide-ranging impact on the function of Planning Committee, there are no EIA issues in relation to this response exercise.

##### 3.2 Crime & Disorder

- 3.2.1 None.

##### 3.3 Safeguarding

- 3.3.1 None.

##### 3.4 Dependencies

# Licensing and Planning Policy Committee

## 3 July 2025

3.4.1 None.

3.5 Other

3.5.1 None.

### 4 Financial Implications

4.1 Whilst any financial savings could not be quantified at this stage, the government sees these changes as a potential way of improving the efficiency and speed of decision making at a local level.

4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Currently, there is no measurable direct revenue or capital impact from this consultation. However, it is essential to monitor developments in this area and incorporate any changes into the council's financial planning.

### 5 Legal Implications

5.1 While there are not thought to be any legal implications directly associated with this report, there would be implications – and potentially significant ones if the Government bring forward mandatory changes to how our Planning Committee and planning decision making – processes operate.

5.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** None other than as set out above.

### 6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

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

5) EC4 - Improve openness, transparency and customer service

6) GV4 – Encourage high quality design which balances the built environment with new open green spaces.

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** None.

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None.

6.5 **Partnerships:** None.

6.6 **Local Government Reorganisation Implications:** None.

### 7 Background papers

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

**Previous reports:**

# Licensing and Planning Policy Committee

## 3 July 2025

- None.

### **Other papers:**

- Reform of planning committees: technical consultation webpage:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation>