

Review of the Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Committee

Purpose

This report identifies governance matters for the Council's consideration in determining the future management of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Committee Membership

The Terms of Reference require the Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Committee to comprise **five Town Councillors and five non-councillor members**. The Committee is not currently constituted in accordance with those requirements.

Neighbourhood Plan Process Interests

These are **planning process interests**, not necessarily Code of Conduct interests and apply to all Councillors and the non-Councillor members of NPAC. They arise because neighbourhood planning guidance expects the process to be transparent and for anyone involved in preparing or recommending site allocations to disclose interests that could reasonably be perceived as influencing their judgement. These can include:

- ownership of, or proximity to, land under consideration;
- membership of organisations campaigning for or against particular sites;
- involvement in land promotion or development proposals; and
- public or private statements or campaigning that may give rise to a perception of predetermination.

These interests should normally be declared and managed as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process, even if they do not amount to a registrable or disclosable interest under the Members' Code of Conduct.

Concerns have been raised with the Town Clerk regarding a small number of potential personal and organisational interests, together with circumstances that may give rise to a perception of predetermination in relation to specific allocation sites. These matters should be reviewed and, where appropriate, managed before further work on site allocations is undertaken.

The Council is invited to consider whether the most effective governance arrangements for completing the Neighbourhood Plan would be to dissolve the Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Committee and place responsibility for delivery directly under the governance of Full Council.

The Council may wish to consider that:

- retaining or reforming the Committee is unlikely to represent the most effective governance arrangement for completing the Neighbourhood Plan;
- reforming the Committee would require recruitment of new members, agreement of membership, and re-establishment of governance arrangements before substantive work could recommence;
- this process is likely to take time and may delay progression of the Neighbourhood Plan;

Conclusion

The Advisory Committee exists to advise and assist the Council, but responsibility for the exercise of the Council's functions and decision-making remains with the Council, and not all functions can lawfully or appropriately be delegated to an advisory committee.

The Neighbourhood Plan has reached a stage where effective governance and timely decision-making are imperative.