

Report of Chief Officer Democratic and Central Services

Report to full Council

Date: 12 September 2012

Subject: Recommendations of General Purposes Committee – review of plans panels

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number: N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. This report presents recommendations to full council from General Purposes Committee, following its consideration at its meeting on 30 August 2012, of an report from the Chief Planning Officer relating to a review of Plans Panels.
2. The report of the Chief Planning Officer made proposals for establishing an new strategic panel, to deal with those planning applications with significant implications for the future prosperity of the City's economy. It also proposed revising the geographical boundaries for the existing two area panels, and for them to be renamed the North and East, and South and West panels to more closely reflect the areas served.

Recommendations

3. General Purposes Committee recommend full Council to approve the revised plans panel arrangements as set out in this report, the revised arrangements to include:
 - the terms of reference for a strategic plans panel, to be named the City Plans Panel, as set out at appendix 1 of this report, with the relevant boundaries referred to in the terms of reference, as indicated on the attached appendix 2;
 - the terms of reference for Area Plans Panels as set out at appendix 3 to this report – these being the North and East Plans Panel, and the South and West Plans Panel, the boundaries for which are shown on the attached appendix 4 to this report;

- an amendment to Article 8 of the constitution, as set out in appendix 5 to this report, to dis-apply the restriction on membership numbers to the proposed City Plans Panel.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report presents recommendations to full Council from General Purposes Committee, relating to a review of plans panels.

2 Background information

- 2.1 General Purposes Committee is authorised:

- to consider proposals to amend the constitution and make recommendations to full Council; and
- to make recommendations to full Council in connection with the discharge of any of its functions.

- 2.2 At its meeting on 30 August 2012, General Purposes Committee considered an item relating to a review of plans panels. This report sets out the recommendations from General Purposes Committee, further to that item.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The report of the Chief Planning Officer to the General Purposes Committee, followed a review of current Plans Panels arrangements by the plans panel working group. The objectives of the review were:

- The need for timely, effective and efficient decision making which reflects the Council's ambitions to promote regeneration and economic recovery
- The need to ensure that there is effective local involvement in the decision making process
- The need for consistent decision making, so that similar applications are dealt with in the same way throughout the City
- To deliver high levels of satisfaction with decision making (for residents, applicants and Members)

- 3.2 The report summarised significant changes to the context of planning decisions, at national, regional and local level, including the National Planning Policy Framework, the Localism Act 2011, the recent City Region Deal, the proposed planning guarantee and a significant reduction in applications submitted to the Council since 2006/7.

3.3 A strategic City Plans Panel

- 3.3.1 The report set out proposals for a strategic plans panel with responsibility for making decisions on strategically significant planning applications for the district and for those city centre planning applications which are considered by Members. The report advised that that this panel would have a simplified and more focussed agenda, to allow greater discussions on those applications of major significance to the future of Leeds. This would also:

- Support improved performance targets, particularly in respect of major applications which are particularly linked to the regeneration and economic prosperity of the city and its residents
- Provide a consistent decision making framework on the most controversial and sensitive applications so that similar applications are dealt with in the same way throughout the city, providing good governance and
- Allow for additional opportunities for public speaking (where appropriate).

3.3.2 The proposed terms of reference for the strategic panel are attached as appendix 1 to this report, with the relevant boundaries referred to in the terms of reference identified in appendix 2. The terms of reference determine the strategic matters to be considered by the new panel.

3.3.3 On the criteria proposed, and set out in the proposed terms of reference, the report advised that the strategic panel would in 2010 -11 have considered approximately 30 applications, thus allowing a much greater focus on strategically significant applications. Area Plans panels would still oversee both important major and minor planning applications, although the major applications would be smaller in scale.

3.3.4 The report further proposed that the strategic panel should have representatives from all political groups. Article 8 of the constitution currently prescribes an upper membership limit of 11, for plans panels, so an amendment to Article 8 would be required to increase membership beyond this number.

3.4 Area Plans Panels

3.4.5 The report advised that the application workload is currently disproportionately greater for the current East Panel (a reflection of the size and geographical make-up for the area). Revisions were therefore proposed to the boundaries of the panels, as shown in the attached appendix 4, to make the workloads between the area plans panels more equitable. It was also proposed that the area plans panels be renamed North and East, and South and West plans panels to more closely reflect the areas served.

3.4.6 The proposed changes takes account not only of workloads, but also the need to achieve timely and predictable outcomes for major developments, and to improve performance in the determination of major applications, and the importance of securing wide involvement and participation in the planning process. The number of smaller applications considered by each of the area plans panels would approximate to 100 per year, on an existing workload, or 10 applications per meeting.

3.5 Operation of Plans Panels

3.5.1 The Chief Planning Officer's report proposed that substitution arrangements should continue with Development Plans Panel, and that the quorum for all of the Panels should be 4.

- 3.5.2 The report also outlined a number of concerns raised by the working group, relating to pre-application processes, the public speaking protocol, nature and form of officers presentations and operational matters relating to more effective officer-member communication on major applications.
- 3.5.3 The Committee noted and supported the Executive Member's commitment to produce, at the earliest opportunity, in consultation with Members from all political groups, a revised protocol for pre-application involvement, and an action plan to take forward suggestions made from the working party. Pending the revised protocol, the Committee instructed the Chief Planning Officer to urgently (in the period leading up to the Council meeting) seek cross-party consensus, on an interim set of principles to govern how the panels will operate.
- 3.5.4 The Committee also resolved to review the operation of the revised plans panel arrangements 6 months after commencement.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.5 The plans panel working group, comprised of representatives from all political groups, and was chaired by the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services. In addition to a survey of Core Cities, and discussing the proposed City Regions Charter with the private sector and Planning Reform Group, the major group Whips and Conservative Group Leader were consulted as well as the plans panel chairs, before the report was prepared for General Purposes Committee.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The Chief Planning Officer's report confirmed that there are no implications for equality and diversity/cohesion and integration arising from these recommendations.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The Chief Planning Officer's report confirmed that the proposed revised recommendations are consistent with and support the aspirations of the Vision and the City priorities.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The Chief Planning Officer's report confirmed that the proposed revised arrangements represent value for money in terms of Member input, and that there are no additional resource implications arising, as there are already three panels. Also, an effective planning decision-making process is crucial to the future funding of the Council, which is dependent upon the delivery of new homes and growth in the local economy.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 No part of this report is confidential or exempt, and the report relates to Council functions, and so is not open to call-in.

4.5.2 The Head of Governance Services advised the Committee that the starting date for the new arrangements should take into account the scheduled meeting of the Plans Panel (West) on 13 September 2012.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 The Chief Planning Officer's report advised that the existing safeguards to panel decision-making would be maintained, with a legal representative attending each meeting. The report advised that a more objective approach to decision making would be likely to reduce the number of adverse appeal decisions and lost applications.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The Chief Planning Officer's report emphasised that it is important that the Council has a decision-making process which reflects the City's ambition to be the best Council and is comparable in speed, certainty and reputation with the other Core cities, in order to attract new development.

6 Recommendations

6.1 General Purposes Committee recommend full Council to approve the revised plans panel arrangements as set out in this report, the revised arrangements to include:

- the terms of reference for a strategic plans panel, to be named the City Plans Panel, as set out at appendix 1 of this report, with the relevant boundaries referred to in the terms of reference, as indicated on the attached appendix 2;
- the terms of reference for Area Plans Panels as set out at appendix 3 to this report – these being the North and East Plans Panel, and the South and West Plans Panel, the boundaries for which are shown on the attached appendix 4 to this report;
- an amendment to Article 8 of the constitution, as set out in appendix 5 to this report, to dis-apply the restriction on membership numbers to the proposed City Plans Panel.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.