

To: City Executive Board

Date: 9 July 2015

Report of: The Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (2015)

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee on the Adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (2015)

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor Hollingsworth, Executive Member for Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services

Policy Framework: Statements of Community Involvement are part of the legislative framework within which local plan documents are prepared. In addition, the aims and commitments in the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning are consistent with the Council's recently-updated Public Engagement Policy Statement.

Recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

1. We endorse the draft Statement of Community Involvement in Planning and recommend that this is amended to include references to the Planning Review Committee, Area Forums and external guidance on the use of visualisation tools.

2. We recommend that the City Council continues to explore new and improved ways of informing residents and community organisations of local planning issues, using both on-line and off-line communication methods. In particular, enhancements to ICT systems should be prioritised so that individuals and groups that have signed up can receive automatic notifications when specific planning applications are progressed or amended.

3. We recommend that the City Council explores whether there is a lower cost means of informing local residents of planning applications as an alternative to “neighbouring property notification letters”. We suggest that proposals are brought forward in the next budget round.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the Adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (2015) at its public meeting on 30 June 2015. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Lyndsey Beveridge and Adrian Roche for presenting this report and answering questions.
2. The Committee had previously considered the Draft Statement of Community Involvement at its meeting in November 2014. Officers were thanked for taking the Committee’s previous comments and recommendation on board.

Summary of the discussion

3. The Committee supported the Adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (2015) and commended officers on the Statements tone and the way it was written.
4. The Committee noted the statutory nature of the document and the need to refrain from designing a planning toolkit whilst considering it.
5. Members noted that the Planning Review Committee and Area Forums were not mentioned in the Statement.
6. The Committee supported developers using visualisation tools to make planning applications more visual, and suggested that this should be made more explicit in the Statement, with a link to the help-sheet added. The Committee heard that this was not been covered in more detail in the main document because it was an evolving area but officers looked to keep up with best practice.

Recommendation 1 - We endorse the draft Statement of Community Involvement in Planning and recommend that this is amended to include references to the Planning Review Committee, Area Forums and external guidance on the use of visualisation tools.

7. The Committee asked whether resident groups were able to register an area of interest and receive auto-notifications. The Committee heard that the Council’s IT systems did not currently enable this but that it

was not technically difficult to do. Officers were looking to achieve wider involvement through methods such as the Council's app, and are exploring whether local groups could play a role in making planning documents available in paper form.

Recommendation 2 - We recommend that the City Council continues to explore new and improved ways of informing residents and community organisations of local planning issues, using both on-line and off-line communication methods. In particular, enhancements to ICT systems should be prioritised so that individuals and groups that have signed up can receive automatic notifications when specific planning applications are progressed or amended.

8. The Committee discussed whether, in addition to site notices, printed letters should be sent to neighbours to inform them of planning applications. Members noted that the cost of issuing notification letters for the 2,000 planning applications processed each year was 45k and that this cost had not been budgeted for. Not all the committee agreed on the need to reinstate planning notification letters but as there was considerable interest in this, lower cost approaches should be explored (for example, simply putting copies of planning notices through nearby letterboxes at the same time as they are publicly posted), and costings for this brought forward as an option for the next budget round.

Recommendation 3 - We recommend that the City Council explores whether there is a lower cost means of informing local residents of planning applications as an alternative to "neighbouring property notification letters". We suggest that proposals are brought forward in the next budget round.

Executive response – to follow

Name and contact details of author:-

Andrew Brown on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Officer
Law and Governance
Tel: 01865 252230 e-mail: abrown2@oxford.gov.uk

List of background papers: None
Version number: 1

This page is intentionally left blank