

Report of Chief Planning Officer**Report to Joint Plans Panel****Date: 31 January 2017****Subject: Member training 2017-18**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	☐ Yes	☐ No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	☐ Yes	☐ No

Summary of main issues

1. This report describes the programme of training for members of the Plans Panel in 2017-18.
2. Due to the changes to the Council procedure rules allowing more flexible substitution, there will be more members to undertake the compulsory training this year.
3. In addition to the mandatory training, a programme of other learning opportunities is presented to members, adding further to member's knowledge and providing the most up to date information and approaches available on a range of planning issues.

Recommendations

4. Members are recommended to note the report.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report describes the changes made to the Councils Procedure rules in relation to substitution at the Plans Panel meetings and its relation to member training. Attendance as a substitute at Plans Panel will remain contingent upon having received up to date training appropriate to the role and this report goes on to describe the proposed training programme for member for 2017-18.

2 Background information

- 2.1 A report recommending changes to the Council Procedure Rules to allow greater flexibility around the appointment of substitutes to Plans Panels went to the General Purposes Committee (GPC) on December 5th 2016.
- 2.2 Members of GPC agreed that in relation to each Plans Panel, the Council shall appoint a list of substitute members comprising all other members of the other Plans Panels, the Development Plan Panel and the Licensing Committee. In addition, the list may include any members, nominated by their group Whip, who are not members of these committees, but have received appropriate training. A nominated member shall be entitled to attend meetings in place of a regular member, subject to the substitute member having received appropriate training and will also be bound by the Planning Code of Good Practice and other relevant policies and procedures whilst acting as a voting member of the Plans Panel. The recommendations from the General Purposes Committee went to Full Council on 11 January, who agreed the amendments to the Procedure Rules.
- 2.3 Article 8.2.2 of the Council's Constitution, says that Members of the Plans Panels must complete all compulsory training and shall not sit as a Member of the Panel unless such training has been undertaken in accordance with the Council's prescribed training programme

3 Main issues

3.1 Compulsory training

- 3.2 The compulsory training session in order to sit on Panel comprises one or two session(s), depending on the experience of members on planning matters and comprises:
- Planning update: This session updates members with the latest legislation and planning guidance. It also covers any changes to the planning system which will impact on the work of members. All substitute members will attend this session.
 - Additional training for members new to the Plans Panel. This training is run by the Area Planning Officer who goes through the procedural issues associated with the running of the Panel and the basic principles of planning-determine in accordance with development plan/what are material planning considerations and so on etc. In this session officers will also identify some key planning issues, hot topics, direction of travel for policy and probity issues. All substitute members will also attend this session.

3.3 **Additional training and learning opportunities**

3.4 Member site visit tour

- 3.4.1 A tour of past sites which have already received planning permission and have been built will be organised. This allows reflection on the relevant issues at the time of determination on particular applications and how the development has worked out in practice.
- 3.4.2 It is anticipated that this tour will be in Spring 2017 and the list of sites will be drawn up in agreement with the Joint Member Officer Working Group.
- 3.4.3 A request from a Plans Panel member to visit a site outside of the authority to look at a new development is likely to be the subject of a separate site visit.

3.5 Workshop series

- 3.5.1 The Joint Member Officer Working Group has requested that a series of workshops should be held throughout the year focussing on particular planning issues. The workshops will be facilitated by internal staff and will be tailored to address the needs and issues relevant to Leeds. Workshop topics will be discussed and agreed with the Joint Member Officer Working Group.
- 3.5.2 It is anticipated that workshops will be offered on current issues such as hot food takeaways, side extensions and housing design. In addition to providing members with the latest case law, appeal information and council position, the sharing of this information will try to ensure some consistency of decision making across the three Plans Panels. This will be particularly important in relation to decisions to refuse applications, where a consistent approach is important to evidence the decision. The Government's new performance regime commencing in 2018 increases the threshold to 10% of an authority's total number of decisions on major and non-major applications being overturned at appeal, so a consistent approach is vital.
- 3.5.3 The first workshop took place on 13th January on tall buildings. John Thorpe and internal consultees provided a refresher as the existing SPD was published in 2007; much has changed in particular in the South Bank area of the city in relation to tall buildings.

3.6 Chamber of Commerce/ Planning Reform group

- 3.6.1 In June 2016, a successful event was run on viability. The session covered three different perspectives: the Council, District Valuer and that of the volume house builders. The differing perspectives particularly that of the development industry, provided an interesting and challenging look at viability issues.
- 3.6.2 The Chamber of Commerce's Planning Reform Group has offered to run a session with elected members looking at planning from a developer's perspective. This is likely to be a further challenging session, with issues covering housing growth, Government reform, future developments and collaborative working.
- 3.6.3 This session is scheduled for autumn 2017.

3.7 Shadowing planning officers

- 3.7.1 Several years ago the service offered members the opportunity to spend some time in the planning office, shadowing a planning officer. Feedback from members was very positive indicating that the training had provided a valuable insight to the process involved in coming to a recommendation. Such training will be offered again to Members during 2017-18.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.2 Individual elements of the proposed training programme for members have been discussed with the Executive Member for Regeneration, Transport and Planning and with the Joint Member Officer Working Group.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 There are no Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration issues.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The effective and expedient determination of planning applications contributes to the overall prosperity of the City and plays a key part in the regeneration and growth agenda.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 Member training in Leeds is long established and is recognised to be critically important to quality decision making. The programme offered in 2017-18, whilst has resource implications primarily in terms of member and officer time, represents good value for money as it is being delivered flexibly and imaginatively in-house.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 No identified issues.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 There are reputational risks associated with a lack of high quality consistent decision making. The Plans Panels are the shop window to the planning system in Leeds and therefore it's critical to adequately support and equip members with the knowledge and skills needed in order for them to discharge their duties effectively.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Planning legislation and guidance can be complex. Our current approach of providing members with training on the planning process when first serving on the Plans Panel and updates on changes to legislation or procedures is endorsed as good practice by the Local Government Association. This is the mandatory training required in order to serve on a Panel.

- 5.2 The discretionary additional programme of training for 2017-18 offers a diverse range of learning opportunities for members, to suit varying needs and requirements.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are recommended to note the report.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1

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.