

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

COUNTY COUNCIL
3rd March, 2008.

REPORT AUTHOR: Principal Scrutiny Committee

SUBJECT: Review of the Code of Conduct Dealing with Planning Matters / Applications – Wales Audit Office Report.

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Introduction

1.1 The Principal Scrutiny Committee's Planning Protocol Working Group has been meeting since November, 2007 undertaking the review of the Code of Conduct Dealing with Planning Matters / Applications with a view to bringing recommendations to the County Council for implementation from May 2008.

1.2 At its last meeting on 29th January, 2008 the Committee considered the proposals thus far from the Working Group and considered the Wales Audit Office report in respect of the Planning Service (**Attached as an Appendix**), and in particular Recommendation 4 relating to the requirement that the Council within a period of three months review the planning committee structure and give consideration to the establishment of one planning committee of well trained Members with meetings rotating between different venues.

2. Proposal

2.1 The Committee unanimously agreed to recommend to the County Council that a single County Planning Committee be established in line with the Wales Audit Office report, to be implemented with effect from the coming into existence of the new Council in May 2008.

2.2 In the view of the Committee the arrangements for a single County Planning Committee should include the following:

- One single specialised committee dealing with all non-delegated planning applications, comprising 15 Members elected by the political groups.
- The committee would be peripatetic i.e. meetings held in the Shire from where the application originates.
- The committee would meet in accordance with a regular schedule of meetings i.e. on a 2 weekly basis. As the current workload of planning sub-committees indicates a higher proportion of applications from Montgomeryshire the committee would meet on the following basis in an 8 week cycle:

Week 1 - Montgomeryshire
 Week 3 - Radnorshire
 Week 5 - Montgomeryshire
 Week 7 – Brecknockshire

This cycle would of course be adjusted if circumstances required and would be altered to reflect any changes there may be to workload in the future.

- The committee would use Council buildings or other suitable community venues where appropriate so that meetings were held as close as possible to the application sites under consideration.
- If in wholly exceptional circumstances it was necessary to undertake a site visit, the committee would do so on the same day as the matter was determined, prior to the commencement of the formal meeting.
- Members of the Committee would be offered training to an accredited level.
- In order to achieve training accreditation a competency framework should be prepared for Members and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the County Planning Committee indicating skills required.

2.3 The Committee is further of the view that the Council should retain its current rule that a Member could not sit as a Member of a Planning Committee if they had not received the required training.

2.4 With the introduction of a single County Planning Committee the Committee noted that the remaining 58 Members would become automatically “Local Members” under the planning protocol, and would thus have significantly fewer restrictions imposed on them in dealing with the public in relation to planning matters in contrast to their current role as decision makers.

2.5 Given the nature of the demands on a single County Planning Committee the Committee considered that the Political Groups should be invited to consider carefully the appointment of such Members to other committees.

3. Corporate Improvement Plan

3.1 The proposal set out above clearly falls within that part of the Corporate Improvement Plan 2007 – 2010 relating to “Enhancing the Natural and Built Environment. The present arrangements (4 planning committees and the involvement of all 73 Members) has been highlighted as an area of High Risk within the Council’s Joint Risk Assessment. The proposal is also seen as a major contribution towards the improvement of the Council’s overall Corporate Health.

4. Options Considered / Available

4.1 The Council must address the issues raised by the Wales Audit Office report, and must do so promptly within the specified three month period. The report clearly indicates that the establishment of a single County Planning Committee is the only way forward and maintaining the status quo is not an option.

5. Consultation.

- 5.1 The proposal has been discussed by the three Shire Committees during February, 2008 so as to give all Members the opportunity to consider the matter ahead of the County Council meeting.
- 5.2 The Board will also consider the matter on 28th February, 2008. A verbal update will be provided to the Council on the Board's decision.

6. Preferred Choice and Reasons

- 6.1 Accordingly the proposal for a single County Planning Committee as set out in paragraph 2.1 is commended to the County Council.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
That the County Council approves the establishment of a single County Planning Committee as set out in paragraph 2.1 in the report from May 2008.	To address the recommendations contained in the report of the Wales Audit Office dated November 2007.

Relevant Policy (ies):			
Within Policy:	Y / N	Within Budget:	Y / N

Relevant Local Member(s):	N/A
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Head of Legal, Scrutiny and Democratic Services and Head of Planning Services.
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	May 2008

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Background Papers used to prepare Report: