



PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HIGH QUALITY ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC – PORTFOLIO HOLDER’S RESPONSE TO THE ENERGY EFFICIENCY INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP’S RECOMMENDATIONS

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council’s Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Corporate Director (Governance), the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Principal Scrutiny Committee and all Members of the relevant Scrutiny Panel (individual Ward Members are consulted separately where appropriate). In addition, all Members are notified.

Five or more of these consulted Members can require that the matter be referred to Cabinet for determination.

Contact Officers:

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SUMMARY

The Energy Efficiency and the Planning Process Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) was established by the Environment Scrutiny Panel meeting, held 2 February 2010. The creation of the ISG had been inspired by the Audit Commission’s paper [“Lofty Ambitions: the Role of Councils in reducing domestic CO2 emissions”](#).

The Group’s terms of reference were “to consider how the Council can best use its strategic planning and development management processes to ensure energy efficiency through the construction and refurbishment of buildings.” In so doing, the Group looked at current Government guidance, national and local planning policies (adopted and emerging), the availability of expertise within the authority and the leadership role of the Council in cutting CO2 emissions.

The Group concluded that there is a need to take steps to address a lack of in-house knowledge and expertise to deal with energy efficiency issues in relation to development control. Furthermore, consideration should be given to the development of local guidance and policies, in respect of the emerging LDF, aimed at achieving greater energy efficiency and sustainability as well as looking at the experience of other organisations in the promotion of these objectives.

The Group's recommendations were agreed (with a minor amendment to recommendation 2i) by the Environment Scrutiny Panel, at its meeting held on 17 November 2010 ([Report EN104](#) refers). Those recommendations were in turn considered by Cabinet. At its meeting on 8 December 2010 Cabinet agreed that the recommendations should be dealt with by the Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment, through the Portfolio Holder Decision Making process (hence, this Decision Notice).

DECISION

That the recommendations below, agreed by the Environment Scrutiny Panel on 17 November 2010 be followed:

a) that, as the Group had discovered that there was a critical lack of expertise within the Planning Management Team on energy efficiency issues (and to underpin the policies emerging through the Local Development Framework process) the Council should urgently investigate the possibility of joint working, etc. The Group agreed that "doing nothing" was not a viable option and that the alternative to joint working should be to create an in-house facility through training existing officers. *(The Group were agreed that this was the most important recommendation of their review and that, even within the current budget constraints, relatively small resources should be made available to action these recommendations.)*

b) that the Council investigate whether the C- Plan system would deliver significant benefits in relation to the determination of planning applications in the Winchester context.

c) that the Council investigate ways to support WinAcc's initiative to promote forward thinking from developers on energy efficiency issues and consider establishing links from the Council's Planning and Building Control web-pages to a page entitled "Is your application as green as it could be?" This page could then refer the reader onto other, external, links giving advice on energy efficiency matters.

d) that a representative of the National Farmers Union be invited to participate on the High Quality Environment Group (part of the Winchester District Strategic Partnership).

e) that Cabinet or senior officers be encouraged to contact Thameswey (Woking Borough Council) to hear directly their experiences of encouraging and assisting the development of energy efficient projects.

2. That the recommendations to the Cabinet (Local Development Framework) Committee and the responses outlined below be agreed:-

i) the Council should consider working towards adopting a supplementary planning guidance to improve energy efficiency, in light of the Group's work.

Response: An officer group is being established to progress the production of guidance on sustainable development. This will also assist in the implementation of the Interim Policy Aspirations approved by Council in January 2011.

ii) the importance of providing sufficient garden space for home grown produce and the provision of allotments be highlighted to the Local Development Framework Committee.

Response: Noted. The LDF Core Strategy will include appropriate policies in relation to housing density and the provision of allotments (which are included in the proposed new Open Space standards).

iii) the Local Development Framework Committee be recommended to note that energy efficient homes should not be an impediment to good and sympathetic design.

Response: Noted and agreed.

3. That the Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment be requested to report on Cabinet's consideration of these recommendations to the next meeting of the Panel (to be held 8 February 2011).

4. That the Panel review Cabinet's implementation of the above recommendations in twelve months time, at its meeting to be held November 2011.

REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The Group met on 4 occasions and heard from the Portfolio Holder for the Environment and senior Council officers responsible for Planning Management, Strategic Planning, Building Control, Conservation and managing the authority's estate. External organisations were also involved. The WinACC Built Environment Group and the Energy Centre for Sustainable Communities, who have developed a sustainability tool (C-Plan) which is used by development control planners at Woking Borough Council, also contributed.

In addition, the Group visited the Thamesway Group of companies at Woking Borough Council to understand how they have developed a combined heat and power system in the town centre and at other locations in the country. They also viewed sites where retro-fit photovoltaic technologies have been installed and inspected a new high energy efficient housing development.

Having considered all of the information gathered the Group concluded that there is a need to take action to address a critical lack of knowledge in the Planning Management Team in relation to energy efficiency issues which should involve looking at the possibility of joint working and, if this is not feasible, specialist training for existing staff to create an in-house resource. The Council should also explore whether the C-Plan system used in Woking would achieve significant benefits for Winchester.

The Group considered whether action in this area was required and concluded that doing nothing was not an option given the importance of this issue in the planning process. Relying on buying in external specialist advice would be a more expensive option compared to developing joint working/in-house knowledge.

The Council should also look at supporting WinACC's initiative to encourage forward thinking from developers on energy efficient issues by providing suitable links on the Council's website. This would be preferable to the alternative option of the Council producing its own guidance, which would be more resource intensive, and may duplicate existing advice. Consideration should be given to contacting Thamesway to hear their experience of promoting energy efficient projects.

The Group also decided that, as part of the work carried out for the LDF, consideration should be given to supplementary planning guidance designed to improve energy efficiency and the inclusion LDF policies to ensure housing developments provide sufficient garden space for home grown produce and allotments. This would create a more robust policy position for Winchester than the option of relying solely on national policy, guidance and standards.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Joint working, or providing officer training, would require additional resources which could not be met from within existing budgets. In the event that it was decided that the C-Plan system should be provided in Winchester additional resources would need to be identified as purchasing and maintaining it thereafter could not be met from within existing budgets.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE PROPOSED DECISION

The report and its recommendations were discussed in public meetings and the Informal Group called a number of witnesses including Council officers, the then Portfolio Holder, the Energy Centre for Sustainable Communities Ltd, WinAcc, and Thamesway Ltd.

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

n/a

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

n/a

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

n/a

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision: 09.02.11

Councillor Eleanor Bell – Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment