

Ashford Borough Council

Decisions taken by the Cabinet on 25 June 2020

Minute No	Topic	Decision
432	Update on Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review	<p>The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which updated on the outcomes of the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Challenge/Review of the Council's planning function and performance in terms of determining major planning applications. The Council's Planning Service had in the recent past been an 'exemplar' one, recognised for good performance, but over the past 12-18 months there had been a decline and the Council had been keen to see where it could improve. The Challenge/Review took place in January 2020 and the subsequent report recommended the adoption of an action plan to address a range of issues affecting performance. The report set out those issues and recommendations and sought Cabinet support for the implementation of an action plan to address the issues and develop and implement the recommendations in the PAS report to improve the performance of the Planning Service, particularly in relation to major applications.</p> <p>Members discussed the recommendation to review the delegation agreement for Ward Members being able to request that an application be referred to the Planning Committee. A majority of Members of the Cabinet present expressed concern about this recommendation. Whilst the proposed requirement for this to be for a 'planning reason' was noted, Members advised that there were often issues that caused a lot of local concern and they did not like the idea of having this right taken away from Ward Members, who were often more aware of the local issues than anyone else. They should not have to be put in a position where they were having to 'argue' with Planning Officers. There was also a danger of disenfranchising those Members who were not Members of the Planning Committee. The Portfolio Holder explained that the thinking behind this recommendation was to try and make sure that applications were not simply called to Committee because they were unpopular. Applications had to be considered on planning grounds, and there was always an opportunity for Ward Members to discuss applications with the Planning Officers, so issues could often be</p>

		<p>addressed without elevating them to Committee and using up valuable Committee time. The Leader said he would not ever support this particular recommendation because he believed Members should continue to have the power to use their discretion and be able to call planning applications to Committee. That would be reviewed in the drawing up of the action plan.</p> <p>In terms of points made about the onerous demands on Members of the Planning Committee, the Portfolio Holder explained that more in depth and expanded Member training was being worked up.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That an action plan be implemented to address the issues and develop and implement the recommendations in the PAS review report, but noting the comments made by the Cabinet about the recommendation to review the delegation agreement to require all requests for referral to Committee to be for a 'planning reason'.</p>
--	--	---