

Report of	Meeting	Date
Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services Director of Development and Regeneration	Development Control Committee	23/05/06

PROPOSALS TO ALLOW PUBLIC SPEAKING IN DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Development Control Committee's comments on the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel's proposals to recommend the introduction of procedures to allow members of the public to address the Development Control Committee.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2. The proposals contained within this report will contribute to the achievement of the 'People' objectives to encourage citizens to become involved in their communities and to improve access to public services.

RISK ISSUES

3. The proposals, if implemented, may pose a number of health and safety risks through an increased number of persons attending Development Control Committees. Those risks will need to be addressed in conjunction with a review of meeting room accommodation.

BACKGROUND

4. The Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee was requested in February 2005 to conduct a scrutiny inquiry into public participation in the Council's decision making process.
5. The principal objective of the inquiry is to identify the means whereby the Council can introduce Area Forums/Committees and public speaking at the various Council meetings to enable effective engagement with the local community in the Council's political decision making processes.
6. The Panel has formed two Sub-Groups (ie Area Forums/Committees Sub-Group and Public Speaking/Questions Sub-Group) to examine the two distinct elements of the inquiry. The Public Speaking/Questions Sub-Group has attended and observed a number of neighbouring Lancashire Districts' full Council meetings as part of its evidence gathering exercise. In addition, the members of the Sub-Group have attended meetings of Ribble Valley, Hyndburn and West Lancashire Councils' Planning Committees. The Councillors' attendance at these meetings has proved invaluable in allowing them an insight into how the Authorities' regulate and operate arrangements for members of the public to speak at the meetings.



7. The results of a questionnaire sent to all Lancashire District Councils, and the two Unitary Authorities of Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool Borough Councils, has revealed that each of the Authorities allow some form of public participation in one of more of their Member meetings.

PROPOSALS OF COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

8. After taking account of several month's inquiry work and evaluating both the survey responses and Members' experiences whilst visiting neighbouring Authorities, it is the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel's unanimous view that the Authority should introduce a regulated and clearly defined system to allow some form of public speaking at meetings of the full Council, Executive Cabinet, Development Control Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny bodies.
9. The Panel considers that, if the Council is to improve its engagement with the public and enhance service provision, it must allow an opportunity for members of the public to express their views and, in some instances, also questions at specified public meetings.
10. The Panel Members consider that proceedings of Development Control Committees will benefit from the following practices:
 - One person to be allowed to address the Committee in favour of the Officer's recommendations on respective Planning Applications and one person be allowed to speak against the Officer's recommendation.
 - In the event of several people wishing to speak either in favour or against the recommendation, the respective group(s) be allowed to elect one spokesperson to address the Committee.
 - If a person wishes to speak either in favour or against an application without anyone wishing to present an opposing argument, that person be allowed to address the Committee.
 - Each person addressing the Committee to be allowed a maximum of three minutes to speak.
 - The Committee's debate and consideration of the planning applications awaiting decision commences after all of the public addresses.
11. The Panel's support of the introduction of appropriate procedures to allow the public's involvement in the meetings of the full Council, Executive Cabinet, Development Control Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny bodies will form part of its recommendations within the Panel's final report on the scrutiny inquiry. The inquiry is expected to be concluded around October 2006, following the Panel's evaluation of the first and second rounds of the three Area Forum pilot schemes and Members' deliberations on the Area Forum element of the inquiry.
12. Before the Officers produce draft procedure rules to regulate public participation in the public meetings of the identified bodies, the Panel would appreciate the views of the Development Control Committee on the plans to recommend the allowance of public speaking at future Committee meetings. The Committee might wish to consider the feasibility of the suggested procedures and, if Members foresee any problems, suggest other operational practices that could be adopted.
13. The Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel recognises the potential problems that might arise in making adequate provision for members of the public to attend and speak at future Council/Committee meetings. With this in mind, it is likely that the Panel's final

report will include a recommendation that the Executive Cabinet authorises a comprehensive review of the current accommodation for public meetings, including an examination of the feasibility of the Lancastrian Room being used on appropriate occasions.

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

14. Adequate risk assessments and provision will need to be made to assure the safety of all staff members and the public if the proposals are implemented.

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

15. The report does not contain any issues that have an immediate financial impact for the Authority. However, if a recommendation for public speaking at the Committee is proposed, there may be financial implications that will need to be considered at the appropriate time.

RECOMMENDATION

16. The Development Control Committee is recommended to:
 - 1) Support the proposals of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel set out in Paragraph 10 for the introduction of public speaking at meetings of the Development Control Committee.
 - 2) Support the proposals of the Panel set out in Paragraph 13 for a review of the current accommodation in the Town Hall to be undertaken to allow the presentation of planning applications and public speaking at meetings of the Development Control Committee, including the feasibility of the Lancastrian Room being used on appropriate occasions.

MARTIN O'LOUGHLIN
HEAD OF CUSTOMER, DEMOCRATIC
AND OFFICE SUPPORT SERVICES

JANE E MEEK
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
A Uren	5122	9 May 2006	ADMINREP/92492AJS