

## GLOUCESTER CITY COUNCIL

**COMMITTEE** : **PLANNING**

**DATE** : **3<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2015**

**TITLE** : **REPRESENTATION LETTERS IN  
COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**REPORT BY** **JON SUTCLIFFE**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This report relates to the current practice of attaching letters of representation received during the planning application process to the Report which Committee considers when making decisions on applications.

### **2.0 CURRENT PRACTICE**

2.1 At present, all representations received during the processing of applications are appended to the Committee Report. The report itself contains a section headed 'Publicity and Representations', and in that section the Case Officer summarises the issues raised in the letters sent to the Council. Correspondence and documents associated with all applications are also available on the Council's website.

2.2 Obviously the volume of representations varies from one application to another, and can range from none or minimal numbers to many hundreds or thousands.

2.3 In preparing reports for Committee, the case officer reads and considers all issues contained in such correspondence, and this is a material consideration in reaching a recommendation in a report.

2.4 In determining applications at Committee, Members often have a significant volume of material to read and consider. While your officers endeavour to ensure that reports are as concise as possible, lengthy reports are sometimes unavoidable. One thing that can however significantly add to the length of reports is the attaching of copies of representations. A brief analysis of the agenda packs for the last 6 meetings of the Committee shows that the reports for decision took up approximately 340 pages, and a further 580 pages were taken up with copies of representations.

### **3.0 COSTS & BENEFITS**

- 3.1 There is clearly a cost involved in preparing and publishing reports. However, this must be balanced against the need for members to have enough information before them to enable them to properly consider agenda items. Below I will offer some observations which may assist Members.
- 3.2 In terms of costs there are costs associated with the printing of paper copies of the agenda. Approximately 25 paper copies of the agenda documents are printed for each meeting of the Committee. Given that from the figures in Para 2.4 above each agenda has roughly 2.6 times more pages than it would had representations not been attached, it can be seen that a considerable reduction in paper could be achieved by not printing copies of representations (roughly 14500 pages in 6 months). In addition to printing costs there is also staff time involved in assembling the representations from the website into the report.
- 3.3 There is no legal requirement for a Planning Committee to have full copies of representations before it in its meetings. While Members must consider the issues raised by such correspondence, it is noted that reports do already contain a detailed summary of the issues raised and an assessment of those issues by the case officer.
- 3.4 The Planning Advisory Service have produced a Briefing Note on Planning Committee Management, and that note offers 'best practice' advice on what a Committee report should contain. Amongst other items, it advises that reports should contain "the substance of any objections" and "the views of people and organisations who have been consulted". The current written format of reports to Committee provides that information, and the copies of representations are additional to that.
- 3.5 It is fully understood that Members will wish to give appropriate consideration to representations received on planning applications. It is whether Members consider having printed copies of those in the agenda is essential to enable them to do this, or whether the report summary should be sufficient. In addition the comments of interested parties are also in front of the Committee by other means such as the public speaking procedure, and the ability of ward members to address the Committee. Outside of the meeting itself the documents are also available for viewing.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 The provision of documents such as representations in full in Committee agendas is a sensitive issue, and essentially involves a balance of the need for Members to be able to properly consider issues relevant to the proposals before them, and the potentially lengthy documentation which can ensue from that and the resources involved in providing it.
- 4.2 It is suggested to the Committee that the benefits of no longer providing such documentation in full will assist in making savings and improving the efficiency of the Committee process. The documents would still be available for

inspection by other means and the Council would still be meeting its legal obligations.

- 4.3 It is suggested to the Committee therefore that it agrees to no longer have full copies of representations printed in the hard copy agenda documents. If Members are cautious about such a step, an alternative is suggested that the change is introduced for the next 6 meetings of the Committee and a report on the matter be brought to the following meeting so that Members can review the position in light of experience over those 6 meetings.

**5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL MANAGER**

- 5.1 That it is agreed that full copies of representation letters will no longer be attached to the paper agendas for Planning Committee.

Decision: .....

Notes: .....

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