

Committee: Full Council

Date: Tuesday, 22
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Title: Protocol for Planning Committee Co-Chairs

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Lead Member: Councillor Edward Oliver, Chair of the Audit
and Standards Committee

Summary

1. This paper proposes a protocol for Planning Committee Co-Chairs, following a request from the Chair and Vice-Chair of Planning Committee, and in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
2. The protocol was considered by the Audit and Standards Committee at the meeting on 25 March and was recommended to full Council for approval.

Recommendations

3. To adopt the protocol for Planning Committee Co-Chairs in Part 5 of the Constitution.

Financial Implications

4. Nil at this stage – it is proposed that the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) agreed for 2025/26, which will be available to the current Chair and Vice-Chair of Planning Committee in any case, will be divided between them in the interim, at no extra expense to the Council. The Independent Remuneration Panel will be asked to formally consider the new Co-Chairs role and make a recommendation on the relevant SRA to full Council, subject to the Protocol's approval.

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
 - None.

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	Nil
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Community Safety	Nil
Equalities	Nil
Health and Safety	Nil
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The protocol has been drafted in accordance with: Local Government Act 1972 Local Government and Housing Act 1989 Local Government Act 2000
Sustainability	Nil
Ward-specific impacts	All wards
Workforce/Workplace	The adoption of this protocol will allow for the sharing of Planning Committee chairing responsibilities.

Situation

7. This Council has previously acknowledged the unique workload placed on members of Planning Committee, as outlined in previous Members' Scheme of Allowances Reviews. This particularly applies to the Chair of Planning Committee, due to their additional responsibilities in respect of preparing for meetings and their role in formal planning procedures, such as pre-briefings, decision notice referrals and appeals. It is also accepted that the Vice-Chair of Planning Committee, who must prepare for each meeting in the expectation that they may have to take the Chair, has a large and equal workload. Proper preparation is essential to having an understanding of each case. Frequently, it requires finding and assimilating relevant documents forming the background to the case. In recognition of this burden, the Council proposes to adopt a Planning Committee Co-Chairs Protocol as attached (Appendix A).
8. Planning Committee has the highest frequency of meetings of any committee at Uttlesford District Council. Its conventional timetable, including 2024-25, stipulates that the Committee will meet thirteen times in a municipal year. In the 2023-24 municipal year, the committee met fifteen times; the expanded timetable was put in place due to partly due to designation, but also due to the sheer number of major planning applications received by the Council.
9. Further to the number of meetings of the Planning Committee, it is acknowledged that these meetings are generally much longer than other committees. Since the meeting on 1 May 2024, the average length of Planning Committee was four hours and eleven minutes. Many cases need to be determined by a deadline, so Planning Committee meetings generally continue until all the agenda items have been dealt with.

10. The number and length of these meetings places an excessive burden on the Chair, who is tasked with managing a complex and regulatory process as well as maintaining good order, over a sustained period of time. However, due to the authority placed in the Chair by the Constitution, it is not possible for the Chair to be relieved by the Vice-Chair while they are still in attendance at the meeting, as the Constitution only empowers the Vice-Chair in the absence of the Chair. The Co-Chairs protocol proposed would permit two members to share these responsibilities, subject to the rules contained therein.
11. Subject to approval, it should be noted that the Co-Chairs of Planning Committee role would constitute a new position within the Council's current Members' Allowances Scheme. Therefore, the new role will be escalated and reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel, who will be asked to provide a recommended special responsibility allowance for the consideration of full Council as soon as feasible. However, in the interim it is proposed that the Co-Chairs divide the special responsibility allowances available to them in 2025/26; this would be the Planning Committee Chair and Planning Committee member SRAs (£5881.79 and £1,176.36) resulting in an interim allowance of £3,529.075 for each Co-Chair.
12. Subject to approval at full Council, it is proposed for the protocol to take effect from the Planning Committee meeting on 7 May 2025.

Risk Analysis

13.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The Chair maintains an excessive burden in respect of Planning Committee chairing duties.	3	3	Formally share chairing duties between two members, as outlined in the draft protocol.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.