

Committee(s):			Date(s):
Planning & Transportation Committee		For decision	9 January 2017
Subject: Public Comments in Planning Reports			Public
Report of: Chief Planning Officer			For Decision
<p style="text-align: center;">Summary</p> <p>Some Members had queried whether it is necessary to attach comments at the end of each report and expressed concern at the volume of paper that this generated, whilst others had appreciated that the information is readily available to them.</p> <p>In July 2017 Members were advised about the various methods of reporting comments received in respect of planning applications reported to committees in other London planning authorities.</p> <p>A table summarising the methods used by other local authorities on further investigation has proved to be incorrect arising out of the misinterpretation of replies to a questionnaire submitted by those authorities for which I apologise.</p> <p>Members resolved to maintain the Committee's current practice. However further investigation has revealed that the Committee's practice is at variance with most other local planning authorities in London and a revised system is therefore recommended to you which removes the volume of papers in the report bundle but still provides Members with the full comments.</p>			
<p>Recommendation</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that reports will include a fuller summary of comments received but copies of the actual documents will be provided as a separate bundle. Members will receive the Committee papers as per their current arrangement with the Town Clerk in electronic form and in addition where agreed, in paper form.</p>			

Main Report

Background

1. In July Members were advised about the various methods of reporting comments received in respect of planning applications reported to committees in other London planning authorities.
2. A table summarising the methods used by other local authorities on further investigation has proved to be incorrect arising out of the misinterpretation of replies to a questionnaire submitted by those authorities.

Current Position

3. The City Corporation's approach is to summarise the comments in the body of the report and to attach the emails/letters received.

4. The Statement of Community Involvement (July 2016) at para. 3.26 states

When an application is referred to the Planning and Transportation Committee, a summary of all relevant comments or objections are included in the report and the comments are attached or placed in the Members' Reading Room. In the case of delegated decisions, the comments are summarised in the report and held on the planning file.

5. The comments are included in the report itself rather than placed in the Members' Reading Room as a separate bundle, as being the better way to ensure that they are available to Members.
6. Members will be aware that one of the grounds for reporting cases to Committee is that 5 or more objections have been received. This threshold means that there maybe 5 or many hundred representations. While this may be burdensome to read, this approach makes it transparent so that if there were a judicial review of the Committee's decision it is clear that Members have had the relevant information available to them.

Practice in other authorities

7. Officers undertook to review the position, particularly in relation to practice at other London Planning Authorities and to report back. A questionnaire was sent to approximately a dozen other London planning authorities, including those surrounding the City.
8. A more detailed review has now been undertaken of the report formats prepared by the local planning authorities which returned the questionnaires. An updated table is attached as Appendix 1
9. Westminster and Camden make the original comments available in a bundle for the councillors at the committee.
10. Newham reproduces the comments verbatim in the report in a table matched with the section of the report in which the comments are dealt with.
11. Richmond directs councillors to the website where the comments have been uploaded.
12. In all other reports that have been reviewed there is no reference to how the councillors would access the original comments, although they may have that information from their general knowledge of how their local planning authority operates.
13. The practice of other London planning authorities is typically to summarise the comments. In some cases this is quite detailed but in some the comments are simply summarised by topic or use few words.

14. Some have a consultation section at the front of the report either in table or text format which deal with all the comments at that point. Some have the consultation section in the body of the report and deal with the comments at that point.

Proposals and recommendation

15. It is inevitable that both objectors and supporters will make points that repeat the points of others. Complaints are received when commentators consider that their comments have not been adequately summarised in the body of the report.
16. However, if Members wish to adopt a different approach, the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) would need to be altered to reflect the Committee's decision. While there is no legal requirement to consult on the proposed amendment, it is best practice and the City Corporation has always done so in the past.
17. It is recommended that there will be an improved and consistent system of summarising comments in the body of the report.
18. Copies of comments will be provided in a separate bundle. The comments will be in date order received and will differentiate between supporters and objectors. Some comments may cover both for and against and these will be added to a mixed section, if appropriate.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Amended table

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