

## **PROPOSAL FOR MONTHLY MEMBER BRIEFING SESSIONS ON PRE-APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS**

### **Item HP 25/31 referred from Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee of 15 July 2025**

Consideration was given to a proposal to establish regular, officer-chaired briefing sessions for Members, providing early visibility of major development proposals progressing through the pre-application process. The aim was to enhance Member engagement while maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of the planning process.

As highlighted to Members, this new category of early Member engagement session service was intended solely for major and strategic development proposals and, in order to be eligible for participation, a scheme must fall within one of the qualifying categories and must either be currently undergoing or had recently completed one of the Council's formal pre-application services. Detailed qualifying criteria and proposed fees were set out in Section 4 of the report and in Annex 1 attached to the report.

Furthermore, within the proposal there was provision for an optional follow-up session, subject to a discounted fee, which could provide an opportunity for a revised scheme to be presented, demonstrating how the earlier Member feedback had been taken into account in the design development process.

Following a benchmarking exercise, the cost of presentation to Members for each scheme was proposed to be £1000 for an initial presentation and £500 for each follow-up presentation, and it was noted that these were compliant with the relevant legislation under the Local Government Act 2003.

A proposed structure and details of the operation of the sessions were set out in Section 5 of the report. With regard to the membership for these sessions, given that there was scope for all Members to be invited so that they could have a strategic oversight of the developments within the borough, particularly in the case of a planning application in one planning committee area having impact on another area, Members supported that invitation of the sessions be sent to all Members.

In addition, Members were reminded that information shared during these sessions should not be disclosed to the public at this stage and that they should keep an open mind throughout the session. In response to concerns raised by Members in respect of the risk of pre-determination, it was clarified that as Members were not making decisions at these sessions but only providing advice based on their local knowledge, pre-determination was not considered an issue within this proposal.

Members welcomed the introduction of this early-stage engagement opportunity, which would allow them to raise key planning issues, highlight local sensitivities, with

the potential to influence the direction of development while changes could still be readily accommodated.

Finally, due regard was given to the finance and value for money consideration, the risk assessment and the legal implications outlined in the report.

It was proposed by Councillor King (Chair), seconded by Councillor Dalton and the Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee

**RECOMMENDED\***: That the proposed approach to Council, indicating support for the establishment of monthly briefing sessions and the introduction of the proposed fees, which would supplement the existing pre-application services and as set out in Annex 1, be endorsed.

**\*Recommended to Cabinet**