

TO: PLANNING COMMITTEE – 14 FEBRUARY 2005

SUBJECT: RE-REGISTERING TO SPEAK AT PLANNING COMMITTEE

FROM: COMMITTEE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the results of the investigation by Committee Services into the requirement for members of the public and Councillors to re register to speak on the night of the meeting.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the 6 December 2004 meeting of this Committee it was requested that Committee Services investigate the need for members of the public and Councillors to re register with the Committee Services Officer at the Town Hall, between 5.15pm and 5.30pm on the day of the meeting. The Committee expressed concern that sometimes members of the public and councillors had to wait for four or five hours to speak at the meeting. The Committee also asked that neighboring authorities be contacted to find out their current practices.
- 2.2 At present Committee Services request that people who have registered to speak at the meeting arrive at the Town Hall and notify Committee Services that they are present between 5.15pm and 5.30 pm on the day of the meeting.
- 2.3 This allows the Committee Services Officer present to answer any questions the person may have and to run through the procedure with them i.e. show them where to sit, how to turn the microphone on, what they need to do etc. This also allows Committee Services to make any last minute amendments to the list, such as changing people's names and informing the Chair if there is a last minute substitution or withdrawal.
- 2.4 At present the time slot for re-registering is not strictly enforced (although we do not publicise this) and was only put in place to try and avoid a last minute rush and to provide a more customer focused service. It could also delay the start of the meeting if the people due to speak on the first item get held up in the rush or have not arrived in time.
- 2.5 It is unfortunate that some people have to wait around for several hours before their application is considered. We advise members of the public of an estimated time that their application will be considered and that they may want to go away and come back latter on. However we do warn them that this is only guidance and if they are not present when the Committee consider the application they will miss their opportunity to speak.

- 2.6 Although it is frustrating for members of the public to wait before their application is considered by the Committee, a considerable amount of feedback has been received about how useful it is to have an officer on hand to explain the procedure on the night.
- 2.7 Consultation was undertaken with Stratford Upon Avon District and Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, as neither Rugby or North Warwickshire Borough Councils currently permit public speaking at Planning Committee.
- 2.8 Neither Stratford or Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council require people to re register at the meeting as they leave a procedure on each seat in the public seating area. They find this works because of the small number of speakers and low public attendance they have at each meeting.
- 2.9 In the last 12 months Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council have had 214 speakers at 26 Planning Committee meetings, which is an average of 8.2 people per meeting and they have now introduced measures to restrict the number of speakers at each meeting to no more than ten.
- 2.10 In the last twelve months Stratford Upon Avon District Council have had 325 people address their Planning Committees. However, there were 45 meetings over this period which is an average of 7.2 people per meeting
- 2.11 In addition Coventry City Council were contacted regarding their procedure. They have very few people attend their Planning Committee meetings to speak, about one person per meeting. However they ask people to contact the Committee Services Officer at the meeting so that they can explain the procedure and ask any last minute questions before the start of the meeting. They have also received a lot of positive feedback for this service.
- 2.12 Since the introduction of Public Speaking at Planning Committee on 26 April 2004 and excluding the special meeting of the Committee which considered the application for a new terminal building at Coventry Airport, over 287 people have addressed the Committee over 12 meetings, giving an average of 23.9 people per meeting.
- 2.13 At present the public gallery is open to members of the public who have not registered to speak at the meeting from 5.30pm on the day of the meeting. It is not uncommon for a few people to arrive around this time, although the majority arrive around about five minutes before the start of the meeting and it is worth noting that they have to wait for their application to be heard. As with the people registered to speak, along with the Town Hall staff we try to advise members of the public when their application is likely to be heard.
- 2.14 If the need to re register to speak at the meeting was removed it would only shorten the waiting time by 25 minutes and could have a significant impact on the committee by members of the public regularly interrupting the meeting as they are shown to their seat. It would also not allow for any questions members of the public may have or time to explain the procedure to them.

- 2.15 By requiring people to re register to speak the Chair of the Committee are aware of who has or hasn't arrived to address the Committee and therefore can re organise the agenda if necessary.

3. **POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

- 3.1 The report has no impact on the Councils Policy or Budgetary framework.

4. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The content of the report be noted and the current arrangements for re registering on the day of the meeting be continued.

Graham Leach
Committee Services Officer

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

Areas in District Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Included in Forward Plan: No

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