



Winchester City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 2 November 2005

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14 (2)a

Minute 390 Cabinet 12 October 2005 (Page 357)

QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning

“Following the Cabinet approval of the Planning Improvement Plan on 12 October, what action is intended to improve communications with Parish Councils and brief them on the changes to the planning systems that are being introduced?”

Reply

“Parish Councils are an important part of the planning system and we value the work they do on behalf of their communities in commenting on applications, considering the future of specific sites, considering planning policy and working on village design statements. We know that parish councils often feel that their advice and views are not sufficiently taken into account when decisions are made and that they feel distant from some of the processes which affect their residents.

The planning system is a complex regulatory process governed by legislation, case law and the requirement to balance national planning policy with local circumstances and the merits of each application. It is hard for professional officer and agents to keep abreast of the latest situation let alone the volunteers who give their time to serve on parish councils. There is sometimes a large gap in knowledge and understanding of the workings of the planning system which partly explains some of the difficulties that arise.

Two briefing sessions were held on the proposed improvement plan and although not all parish councils attended, a significant number did do so. The request made more often than any other was for more information and training on how parish councils could be effective in the planning process

An important part of the planning improvement plan is therefore to arrange regular training sessions, briefings and to provide better information about individual applications which help parish councils to understand the systems, legislation and policy that we have to operate within. A timetable for this training and briefing will be published shortly. A similar timetable of sessions for Members will also be arranged.

Parish councilors and clerks will have to make time to attend such sessions and I recognize that this is quite a commitment. However, understanding the system is essential if parish councils are to be effective within it.

We will also ensure that parish councils receive details of all the new arrangements for representations and the timetable for meetings once they have been considered by the Planning Development Control Committee later in November.”