

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	17 SEPTEMBER 2015
TITLE	Planning and the Welsh Language
AUTHOR	Arwel Jones (Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery)
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Dafydd Meurig
PURPOSE	<p>a. To scrutinise the Council's Planning Committee's arrangements for dealing with linguistic impact assessments</p> <p>b. To consider how to look further at the issue of the Welsh Language and Planning</p>

Background

1. The issue of Planning and the Welsh Language is a subject of interest and concern amongst councillors and members of the public and two matters require the attention of the committee. The first involves the Council's internal arrangements for dealing with linguistic impact assessments and the other is a far broader one about the status of the Welsh Language within the Planning System.

Background information to planning applications

2. At a recent meeting of the Planning Committee a discussion was held regarding including documents which are background information to planning applications, as part of the committee agenda. Information which is considered background information to a planning application can include assessments and reports on matters such as the environment, affordable housing, linguistic and community matters, the economy, archaeology etc. In this case, an enquiry was made regarding including a copy of the language and community statement as part of the agenda.
3. Information such as a linguistic and community statements and the application's wider background information is available within the public file and on the Council's website. A public file (hard copy) of every planning application, including all the assessments and reports, is available by appointment or it is available to be viewed on the morning of the Committee. In addition, there is access to these documents via the iPads. The argument is that the statements and assessments are all important and care must be taken to ensure that the Committee is not seen to give more emphasis to one planning consideration over and above the others. Therefore, the legal advice is that it would not be appropriate to include one piece of background evidence only as an appendix to the Planning Committee agenda and if any such information is to be included, everything that has been submitted with every application on the agenda would have to be included.
4. It must be borne in mind that planning reports to the Committee are detailed reports which include an assessment of all the material planning considerations and the matters referred to in the background assessments / reports of every application, in addition to the fact that all the information is made public in any case.

5. Since the discussion at the Planning Committee, discussions have taken place and there has been agreement on the need to facilitate access by members (and others) to information presented with planning applications. The intention is to do so by providing links in the electronic version of the Planning Committee agenda to the individual planning applications and also a note on the agenda to contact the Service if members need any further information in terms of access to documents. This system has already been piloted at one committee.
6. The Committee will, no doubt, wish to understand where the Service has got to with this arrangement and assess whether the response is appropriate in the circumstances.

The Status of the Welsh Language in the Planning System

7. As suggested, the second matter is far broader and more complex and it would be unwise to rush to consider the matter without the appropriate background information. The proposal then is to schedule the item for the next meeting of this committee on 17 November, with a report that would:-
 - Set the statutory context in terms of the Planning Bill and so on
 - Explain the National Planning Policy (TAN 20)
 - Explain the Current Local Planning Policy (The Unitary Development Plan and the Supplementary Planning Guidance: Planning and the Welsh Language)
 - Explain how the Department currently works within the current policy context
 - Provide information on the (Draft) Joint Local Development Plan
 - Explain how, in the context of TAN 20, it will be necessary to deal with the Welsh language in deciding on planning applications once the Joint Local Development Plan has been adopted and how the Service is seeking to respond to this
8. It is considered that a substantial report along these lines will enable a sensible discussion on the issue. Subsequent consideration would need to be given to whether further work would follow.
9. The Committee's views are sought.