

Question to Committee from Loretta Whetlor 26th January 2023

1. With reference to paragraph 7.19 of appendix 2, the suggested 3 minutes of “shared time” for public participants should be increased to a minimum of 15 minutes (or 5 individual participants with 3 minutes each). As planning is a key area of council work that residents directly engage with, the current proposal risks making the new council appear remote, undemocratic and indifferent to the views of its residents. In particular, if the application is seen as contentious.

I do understand the need to cut down the time spent on having a large contingent of public participation but it must be remembered that residents should be allowed to have their say.

2. Arrangements for town and parish councils who wish to see applications referred to the planning committees have been proposed without any prior consultation with the sector. While the proposals appear to closely mirror the current process in South Somerset, other districts have different procedures in place. The views of town and parish councils should be sought before the proposals in paragraphs 8.4 and 8.8 of appendix 2 are agreed. A failure to consult parishes on this key policy area could significantly damage the trust and goodwill that has been achieved to date during the LGR process.

Paragraph 8.8 a) puts pressure on smaller parish councils who might not meet on a monthly basis to have to call meetings to specifically talk about a planning matter. The way it is done in Somerset West and Taunton and previously West Somerset District Council has worked well. If the parish or town disagrees with the officers' recommendations then it is referred to committee. If officers or the chair are to decide the outcome of an application, in the main, what is the point of a committee?

I understand the need to get all council committees up and running and members appointed and trained before 1st April 2023 but do feel that more time could be found to give the two areas above some further consideration.

Planning is a very emotive subject (as can be seen from a contentious application which was recently refused in my ward recently) and it is very important that the new council gets this one right otherwise the hard work that has been done already to maintain good links with the parishes/towns could be damaged.

I know there has to be a starting point but hope that my concerns are taken into consideration. . What was to happen with planning in the Unitary has been a subject discussed by many parishes/towns for some time now. . Nobody has come up with anything and then suddenly with less than 10 weeks to go we are presented with this paper. At the many LCN meetings I have attended planning has come up time and time again. No one had an answer I am very concerned that we are going down a path where other views are not being taken into consideration.

I thank you for your indulgence in listening to my request. Loretta Whetlor