

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING:	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	14 March 2012	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E2385
TITLE:	West of England Planning Toolkit	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
Appendix A –Draft West of England Planning Toolkit		

1. THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The West of England Local Enterprise Partnership Board received feedback from a number of groups within the development sector several of whom had raised issues around barriers to growth caused by planning. The Board asked the Infrastructure and Place Group (IPG) to consider ways of overcoming negative perceptions of the planning process to the benefit of all parties, including the identification of procedures which could be applied more consistently.
- 1.2 IPG have recommended that the West of England LEP should in conjunction with the representatives of the development industry publish a planning toolkit to promote a positive and consistent approach to handling large scale planning applications. The IPG are looking for Cabinet endorsement from all four West of England authorities in time for their next meeting in April. In order to meet this timetable this report is brought forward as a special urgency item for this meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Cabinet agrees to:-

Endorse and adopt The West of England Planning Toolkit as set out in Appendix A and report its agreement to the next West of England Infrastructure and Place Group meeting.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct cost implications for the Council as a result of this decision. The approach will not require any additional budget spend. The work associated with the preparation for the Planning Toolkit has been managed from existing budgets within the West of England LEP office with support from a steering group

of officers. It will however allow a more efficient and effective handling of large scale planning applications by Councils within the West of England.

4 CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 4.1 This decision contributes mainly to the corporate priorities of “Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live” and “building a stronger economy”.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 Following a request from the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership Board the Infrastructure and Place Group within the LEP considered a way of working which would promote a more positive approach to handling large scale and complex planning applications. This work was seen to align with the LEP priority to ‘tackle barriers to business growth’ The basis for this was that there is strong evidence that having an up to date planning policy basis and an effective development management process proves to be very beneficial in encouraging business investment.
- 5.2 The aim is to build upon the good practice which exists in all four authorities in terms of pre-application advice and other parts of the Development Management process. This includes the use of a Development Team approach and Planning Performance Agreements which are already offered by the Council. The toolkit is divided into three parts. Part one sets out the key principles which will underpin how the authorities will engage business when managing development. Part two is a Charter which commits the authorities and developers to undertake some practical steps aimed at improving the application process for large scale and complex proposals. Part three is a guide to good practice with links to tools and techniques already used by the authorities.
- 5.3 It should be noted that whilst the Toolkit is designed to provide a consistent approach to the development management process across the four authorities in the West of England. It will not override the adopted Policies within the individual Councils such as Local Plans or Core Strategies.
- 5.4 The collaboration and coordination of process will provide greater clarity of how developers can bring forward major development proposals for consideration by individual Councils. The Toolkit concludes with a commitment to monitor and review its effectiveness on an annual basis.
- 5.5 Should cabinet agree to endorse the Toolkit the next steps would be for officers from the four Councils to ensure that detailed procedures within each Council are aligned and streamlined across the sub region.
- 5.6 The agreed approach will aim provide an improved and consistent way of working which should deliver higher quality planning applications for consideration and decisions delivered within expected timescales.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 The West of England Planning Toolkit will apply to all people regardless of sex, race, disability or other orientation. There are no specific impacts arising from the Toolkit and therefore a proportionate equalities impact assessment is not required.

8 RATIONALE

- 8.1 See section 5 of the report.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 The only other option would be for Cabinet not to endorse the Toolkit. A decision not to endorse this joint protocol would not enable a consistent message across the West of England. It would maintain the status quo in terms of this Council's Development Management processing response. It would also potentially send out a negative message in terms of the state of readiness to deliver the growth set out in the Council's Core Strategy. It would also risk the loss of potential development investment.

10 CONSULTATION

Cabinet members; Overview & Scrutiny Panel; Other B&NES Services;; Local Residents; Stakeholders/Partners; Other Public Sector Bodies; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer.

I can confirm that the Chair of the PTEPDS Panel has agreed that the item should be dealt with under special Urgency Rule 16.

11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

Customer Focus; Sustainability; Human Resources; Property; Human Rights; Corporate; Impact on Staff; Other Legal Considerations.

12 ADVICE SOUGHT

The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	<i>David Trigwell, Divisional Director Planning & Transport 01225 394125</i>
Sponsoring Cabinet Member	<i>Councillor Tim Ball</i>
Background papers	<i>n/a</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	