

Cllr Bill Trite – Supplementary Question

Since, compared with the situation prior to the advent of Dorset Council, these figures show a steep reduction in the number of planning applications being determined directly by the public's elected representatives, can the portfolio holder - who is not the author of this reduction - think of any ways in which this decline represents an improvement in local democracy, or demonstrates the greater involvement of elected Members in the discharge of the Council's functions?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

The decision as to whether or not a planning application needs to be considered by a planning committee is based on Dorset Council's Constitution which sets out a scheme of delegation at part 3 para 6 of Constitution. I would like to point out that in the way we have been running the planning committees and the delegation decisions that Government this year helpfully set out some interim measures to enable urgent decisions to be taken involving a consultation process with committee members while councils could still opt to use powers of urgency if necessary. I am pleased to say that in Dorset such powers were never followed and instead we awaited the legislative green light for virtual committees. Consequently, all planning applications that are required to go to committee under our Constitution have been. The only way to change things is if we actually change the Constitution because those that warrant going to committee I assure you do go to committee, but those that can be done under delegated powers do and as we saw from the Peer Review one of the things that shocked me is that the resource needed to take an application to committee is 10 times the resource needed for delegated powers. Now that isn't a reason for moving things towards delegated powers but when you think of how many you asked for the % but the actual numbers were over 6000 by delegated powers and 140 by committee. That is still a huge number by committee and I will stand by this and I do agree with you that we must be seen to be transparent and representing the constituents who elected us and planning is a hugely vital department in a local planning authority so I take all your points on board but as I say we are doing things as specifically as the Constitution says, if that needs to be changed it has to go through the proper legal channels.