

## PROTOCOL COMMITTEE: 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022

### Review of Planning Information Meeting (PIM) Service

#### 1. Introduction

At the Protocol Committee Meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2021 last, it was agreed that an updated policy on PIMs would be presented to the Protocol Committee with the aim of revising the current policy whereby the threshold for requests is over 50 units / 5000m<sup>2</sup>.

#### 2. Background

The Planning Information Meeting (PIM) service is a non-statutory service introduced during the Celtic Tiger years to assist elected members and local residents in understanding large complex planning applications and which are within the 5 week consultation period.

The purpose of the Service, which is run through the Area Offices, is to provide factual information on a proposal, it is not the role of the planner(s) in attendance to give an opinion, or to give advice on the drafting of submissions or appeals. Any submissions must be made in accordance with the Planning Regulations.

The agreed procedure to date is that the Councillor would contact the Area Office to make an appointment, and ensure that a qualified planner had time to prepare and present the main features of the application.

#### 3. Current PIM Policy

In January 2020, due to the increasing demand for the presentation of smaller applications, a numerical threshold was introduced of 20 residential units.

However, the continued operation of the PIM service during the Covid pandemic, combined with the commencement of the Development Plan Review was putting increased stress on resources. As a result, following a Group leaders meeting in September 2020 on PIMs, a further update was issued to Group Leaders / Area Councillors and Area Managers, with the following criteria for PIM presentations:-

- a. Must be valid application for large /complex developments over 50 dwellings/ 5000 m<sup>2</sup> commercial.
- b. Area Councillors to provide email addresses of all participants.
- c. Max 3 residents representatives per Area Councillor.

In late 2021, one specific application was presented at a PIM which was below the threshold, due to a misunderstanding of the threshold updates, and which resulted in the matter being raised at this Protocol Committee.

The restoration of the two stage planning process (LRD system) with decision making for large- scale residential development returning to the planning authority will now place additional and significant demands on the Planning Department. The LRD applications are required to be assessed in accordance with a wide range of national, regional and local planning policies, including the City Development Plan, Section 28 Guidelines and an array of increasingly complex environmental

obligations. Furthermore, the enactment of legislation requiring a response to all compliance submission for conditions within 8 weeks will further increase pressure on the Planning Department. On the other hand and notwithstanding that applications are viewable on line, it is acknowledged that Councillors and citizens need to be aware of large scale applications, so that informed observations can be made.

4. Recommended Policy on PIMs to Protocol Committee:

Having regard to all of the above it is recommended that the Policy be revised as follows to say:

- a) That the purpose of this non – statutory service is to provide factual information on the main features of the submitted application (or where the information may be found) and relevant Development Plan policy /standards. The presentation is not a substitute for the full application (which is available in the Civic Offices, on the Council website) and as such is not for circulation. It is not the purpose of the PIM to advise on the drafting of submissions, or to give opinions (or request opinions) on the application (which is still undergoing assessment). As the PIM is a non-statutory service the Planner at the PIM will not place any notes of the meeting on file. Any submissions on a planning application must be made in accordance with the Planning Regulations 2001 (as amended). It goes without saying that the PIM should be conducted in a courteous and respectful manner.
- b) The PIMs are for large and/or complex proposals which are of a substantially different scale to the local context. Proposals in excess 30 Units and /or 3000m<sup>2</sup> and more than 3 storeys higher than the prevailing height in the locality would fall into this category, unless exceptional circumstances are demonstrated.
- c) The request for a PIM must be in writing / by email to the Assistant Chief Executive, Planning and Property Development rather than to the Area Manager, as at present. This will allow for a decision on the request to be made as soon as possible, having regard to the nature and scale of the proposal, the planning resources available, and whether a presentation of an application (including a large-scale residential development) to the area committee has already been facilitated/agreed.
- d) To help manage the PIM service, Area Councillors should provide email addresses of all invited participants, and there should be no more than 3 representatives per Councillor subject to a maximum of 10.