

REPORT TO COUNCIL

23 SEPTEMBER 2026

REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM

COUNCIL DECISION

Planning Committee and National Scheme of Delegation

Summary

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 introduced measures intended to modernise the operation of planning committees and establish a new national scheme of delegation. Following public consultation, the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 were made on 15 July 2026 and will come into force on 31 October 2026. The Regulations introduce mandatory requirements governing the determination of specified planning applications and associated consents, together with a maximum planning committee membership of 13.

The Council is required to amend its Constitution, scheme of delegation and Planning Committee arrangements before the Regulations come into force. This report brings those changes together with the revised Planning Protocol, which has been developed with input from members and officers. A range of potential committee sizes has been modelled for the purposes of this report and the associated political balance calculations. Council is invited to determine the future membership of the Planning Committee, subject to the statutory maximum prescribed by the Regulations.

The report has been brought directly to Full Council because the decisions concern the Constitution, the composition of a non-executive committee and the allocation of non-executive planning functions. Council is asked to settle the substantive arrangements and delegate their administrative implementation, subject to the limits described in the recommendations.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)/Decision(s)

To comply with the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 and establish clear, lawful and transparent arrangements for determining planning applications from 31 October 2026.

Recommendations

Council is recommended to:

1. Note the national requirements and determine the size of the Planning Committee, subject to the statutory maximum of 13 members, having considered this report and Appendix 4
2. Agree that the Planning Committee be reconstituted with effect from 31 October 2026; approve the corresponding political allocation, following confirmation by Democratic Services; appoint members in accordance with the nominations received from political groups; and elect the Chair and Vice-Chair of the reconstituted committee.
3. Approve the constitutional amendments at Appendix 1, incorporating the committee size determined at the meeting, and retain the existing quorum of five and requirement for appropriate member training.
4. Approve the substantive Planning Referral and Triage Protocol at Appendix 2, including the local thresholds, member-request procedure, treatment of own-interest applications and requirements for recording and publishing referral assessments.
5. Nominate the Chair of the Planning Committee as the nominated member for the purposes of regulations 5 and 6. Nominate the Vice-Chair as substitute nominated member and authorise the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth to designate in writing a suitably qualified senior planning officer to act as the nominated officer for the purposes of those Regulations
6. Approve the revised Planning Protocol at Appendix 5 and note the implementation arrangements and workflow contained in Appendix 3, the administrative operation of which will be settled under recommendation 8.
7. Confirm that the Head of Democratic Services will issue the statutory allocation notices and administer outstanding nominations under the proper-officer designation recorded in paragraph 2.158 of the Constitution. Any outstanding permanent appointments will be brought back to Full Council; the authority to administer the process does not itself confer power to appoint. Any proposal to fill an unclaimed allocated seat with another member will be brought to Full Council once the statutory requirements have been satisfied.
8. Authorise the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth, Planning Services Manager and Head of Legal Services, to settle the final drafting, numbering and cross-references; approve associated guidance, workflow processes, publication arrangements, internal administrative procedures, implementation documentation and transitional measures; and make consequential amendments necessary to implement Council's decisions. Constitutional updates will be made consistently with paragraph 1.37, and any Local Scheme of Delegation or amendment to it must be agreed by both the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer under paragraph 2.148. This delegation does not permit changes to the substantive thresholds, counting rules, member-request rights or deadline, own-interest

arrangements, committee size, quorum or allocation of decision-making responsibility approved by Council.

9. Agree that any substantive change to those arrangements must be reported to Full Council. Any further substitute nominee needed outside the arrangements approved above must be formally nominated through a lawful Council decision or express delegated authority before exercising the statutory referral function.
10. Agree that the new committee and revised arrangements take effect on 31 October 2026 and request a report to Council after 12 months reviewing the committee's size, local triage criteria and practical operation. The existing arrangements will continue until commencement, subject throughout to the law

Detail

Background and responsibility for the decision

1. The aim behind the national scheme of delegation is to provide greater clarity and consistency about the role of planning committees, enabling committees to focus on key proposals while more minor and technical decisions are made by planning officers. The Regulations replace aspects of the present local discretion over which applications are determined by committee. The Council must therefore amend any existing provision which would permit a different decision-maker from that required by the Regulations.
2. Paragraphs 2.4(a) and 2.4(f) of the Constitution place constitutional amendments, committee composition, political balance and the allocation of chairs and vice-chairs with Council, subject to specific delegations. Paragraph 3.4 permits committee, Chair and Vice-Chair appointments at an ordinary meeting where existing decision-making arrangements are being amended. Motions arising from this report may be made under paragraphs 3.43(e), (f) and (h). These provisions support the direct Council route and appointment sequence proposed in this report.

National scheme of delegation

3. The Regulations distinguish between Schedule 1 applications, Schedule 2 applications and own-interest applications. Schedule 1 applications must be determined by officers. Schedule 2 applications must also be determined by officers unless the nominated officer and nominated member agree to refer them under the statutory gateway. Own-interest applications follow a separate procedure under regulation 6, under which the nominated individuals may agree to committee referral without applying the Schedule 2 significance test.
4. Schedule 1 includes householder applications, minor commercial and minor residential applications, permission in principle, certificates of lawfulness, most reserved-matters applications, applications under planning conditions, prior approvals, biodiversity gain plans and specified applications relating to amendments and planning obligations. The statutory definitions must be applied: for example, the principal minor residential category requires between one and nine dwellings on a site smaller than 0.5 hectares. Connected listed building applications, retrospective applications and own-interest applications require particular attention when classifying a case.

5. Schedule 2 includes larger planning applications, listed building consent and associated planning permission, applications under section 73A for development already carried out, reserved matters relating to a large outline permission, advertisement consent and tree preservation order consent. It also includes specified variations and planning-obligation applications. The definitions and schedules are incorporated into the arrangements at Appendix 2; the local thresholds do not replace them.
6. A Schedule 2 application may be referred where, in the view of both the nominated officer and nominated member, it raises one or more economic, social or environmental issues of significance to the local area, or one or more significant planning matters having regard to the development plan and other material considerations. Both must agree to referral and have regard to the statutory guidance. The significance criteria are alternatives, not cumulative requirements.
7. The guidance gives examples including an outline application for a large allocated residential development, the loss of a community shop in a rural area and changes to a notable listed building in a town centre. It also identifies circumstances unlikely to raise a significant planning matter, such as broad compliance with a detailed site allocation or the resolution of a statutory consultee's technical concern. Significance depends on the circumstances and local context, and new material considerations may justify a different assessment.
8. Existing automatic committee triggers cannot continue where they conflict with the national scheme. Neither the number of representations, a member request nor an officer recommendation to approve a departure from the development plan can, by itself, require committee determination. The changes concern who decides an application; the development plan, other material considerations and relevant consultation requirements continue to apply.

Own interest applications

9. Regulation 6 applies to an application of a kind specified in either schedule which is made, alone or jointly, by or on behalf of the Council, a Council member or a Council officer. It also applies where, in the view of the nominated officer and nominated member, the Council or any of its members or officers otherwise has an interest. These applications are dealt with separately from Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 applications. Committee referral requires the nominees' agreement, but not the Schedule 2 gateway test.
10. The local definitions cannot narrow that statutory meaning. Minor Council development remains an own-interest application where the definition is met, and an officer's application cannot be excluded simply because the officer is not senior or personally known to Planning Services. A family connection will be considered on its facts, including whether a member or officer otherwise has an interest. The proposed Protocol requires all identified own-interest applications to receive a referral assessment, while allowing routine cases to remain with officers where committee consideration is not warranted.
11. Interested or conflicted individuals must not participate in the assessment or determination, and substitutes will be used where necessary. Council applications must also comply with the restrictions in regulation 10 of the Town and Country Planning General

Regulations 1992 concerning determination by a committee or officer responsible for managing the land or buildings. The referral arrangements do not remove those restrictions.

Local triage arrangements

12. The guidance allows authorities to identify which Schedule 2 and own-interest applications need consideration by the nominated individuals; it does not require every such application to be assessed by them. A local triage process will help avoid unnecessary delay and provide greater clarity about the cases considered for possible committee referral. The substantive criteria are set out in Appendix 2 and are incorporated into the constitutional framework by reference.
13. Under the proposed arrangements, Schedule 2 applications will ordinarily receive a referral assessment where they attract more than 10 qualifying representations contrary to the case officer's recommendation, exceed 50 dwellings, exceed 2,000 square metres of commercial floorspace, exceed 1,000 square metres of retail floorspace, or involve listed building consent for a Grade I or Grade II* building other than an application solely concerning conditions. These are the proposed local starting points. They lead to consideration of referral rather than automatic committee determination.
14. The representation threshold increases from more than five under the existing arrangements to more than ten. That increase is a local choice, not a requirement of the Regulations, and Council may retain or amend it when approving the Protocol. Its purpose is to focus the numerical trigger on applications attracting a wider level of contrary representations, while other routes allow significant issues to be considered even where few people have responded.
15. Advertisement and tree preservation order consent applications will be excluded from the numerical representation trigger. They remain eligible for consideration under the other routes in the Protocol where applicable. Petitions, duplicate responses and substantially identical pro-forma responses will be counted as specified in Appendix 2 for triage purposes only; all material issues and the extent of representations must still be accurately considered and reported.
16. Any member may submit a reasoned request for an eligible Schedule 2 application to be considered by the nominated officer and member. The request must ordinarily be made within 21 days of publication of the application details and explain the planning grounds and their significance. It will not guarantee committee determination or create a director-level appeal against the nominees' assessment. The nominated officer may also identify an exceptional significant case outside the stated thresholds, including where new material information emerges before determination.

Nominated individuals and referral records

17. The Chair of the Planning Committee is proposed as the nominated member for the purposes of regulations 5 and 6. The Vice-Chair is proposed as substitute nominated member. Rather than embedding a specific post within the Constitution, it is proposed that the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth designate in writing a suitably qualified

senior planning officer to act as the nominated officer. This approach ensures that the statutory role is exercised by an appropriately qualified planning professional whilst providing flexibility to accommodate future organisational changes without requiring constitutional amendment.

18. The statutory nominations are separate from ordinary committee substitution arrangements under paragraphs 3.13 to 3.16 of the Constitution. A substitute committee member does not inherit the Chair's special statutory functions. Statutory cover may be utilised where a nominated individual is unavailable, absent or has an interest preventing participation. It is not intended as a mechanism for obtaining an alternative assessment from a different nominee.
19. The nominees should make every effort to reach agreement. Where necessary, additional information may be obtained before an assessment is completed, provided that unnecessary delay is avoided. If agreement to referral is not achieved, the application must be determined by an authorised officer. Completed referral assessments will be recorded, published where appropriate and summarised periodically for the Planning Committee in accordance with the Planning Referral and Triage Protocol.

Planning Committee size

20. The Regulations limit a committee determining applications under regulations 5 and 6 to no more than 13 members. Stockton's Planning Committee currently comprises 14 members and a reduction is therefore required. Council must determine the future membership of the Committee having regard to the statutory requirements, governance considerations and political balance implications.
21. Illustrative political balance calculations have been prepared for a number of potential committee sizes. Their purpose is to assist Members in understanding the implications of different options before reaching a decision. No preferred committee size is recommended by officers. Members may wish to consider matters including likely workload, continuity of experience, attendance, resilience in the event of interests or absences and the ability to maintain effective and efficient decision-making
22. Different committee sizes may involve different advantages and disadvantages in terms of continuity, resilience, attendance, participation and political representation. Members are invited to consider those factors, together with future workload and operational effectiveness, when determining the size of the Committee. The Constitution permits trained, politically balanced substitutes under paragraphs 3.13–3.16, where the ordinary member is absent for the whole meeting and the required notification has been given. This provides some additional resilience but does not permit a replacement for a single agenda item. Appendix 4 explains the two size options discussed so far. Council may consider another workable number within the statutory limit, provided its political allocation is confirmed before appointments are made.

Political balance and appointments

23. The reconstituted committee will remain politically balanced under sections 15 to 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The calculation must take account of the

allocation across the Council's ordinary committees as well as the individual committee. The indicative allocations at Appendix 4 therefore require confirmation by Democratic Services before the relevant Council resolution, including any implications for other committees.

24. The formal allocation for the present 14-member committee is six Conservative, six Labour, one TIA and one IBIS. IBIS did not nominate when the committee was last constituted and a Conservative member was subsequently appointed by Full Council, following the required process. That arrangement will not automatically carry forward. The seats will be allocated afresh and every group will have the opportunity to nominate to its new entitlement.
25. On the figures supplied for this report, 13 members would produce an allocation of six Conservative, five Labour, one TIA and one IBIS; nine would produce four Conservative, four Labour and one TIA. If the latter allocation is confirmed and approved, there is no allocated IBIS seat and therefore no IBIS vacancy or three-week nomination process for that committee. If IBIS is allocated a seat, it will again have the opportunity to nominate.
26. Council will first determine size and allocation, then appoint members whose nominations are available and elect the Chair and Vice-Chair. Groups can provide conditional nominations in advance for the realistic size options, although the final appointments must reflect Council's actual decision. The resolutions will operate prospectively from 31 October 2026, with the present committee continuing until then. Outstanding nominations and any later alternative appointments will be handled as set out in Appendix 4.
27. The proper officer must give written notice under regulation 14 following the allocation. Regulation 15 permits an alternative appointment where a group has failed to express its wishes within three weeks beginning with the date of that notice. Under the proposed process an advance indication that a group will not nominate will not cause its seat to be offered immediately to another group. Any alternative appointment will be brought to Council after legal confirmation that the statutory conditions are met; the seat does not pass automatically to any group.

Revised Planning Protocol

28. The revised Planning Protocol brings together the work undertaken with members on conduct and good decision-making. Its provisions on pre-application engagement, briefings, committee meetings, decisions differing from officer recommendations, appeals, site visits and training remain relevant. The sections on own-interest applications and committee referral have been aligned with the new national scheme and now refer to the separate Referral and Triage Protocol.
29. Council is asked to approve the substantive Planning Protocol at Appendix 5. Officers may settle supporting guidance, workflow arrangements, implementation documentation and consequential drafting under the implementation delegation, but changes affecting members' rights, substantive committee procedure or the allocation of decision-making responsibility will return to Council. The Protocol does not amend the Members' Code of Conduct or create a referral route outside the Regulations.

Implementation and delegated work

30. Council is asked to settle committee size, allocation and available appointments, the constitutional framework, substantive triage criteria, member-request arrangements and Planning Protocol. Officers will then finalise the supporting documentation and operational arrangements within those decisions. Paragraph 1.37 already permits the Monitoring Officer, on behalf of and in consultation with the Chief Executive, to make specified updating and minor constitutional changes. The express delegation in this report defines the implementation work authorised on this occasion; changes to Local Schemes of Delegation also require the agreement of both officers under paragraph 2.148. Administrative work will cover workflow documentation, implementation materials, internal circulation arrangements, publication processes, accessible guidance and application-handling procedures, without changing the approved thresholds or 21-day member-request period
31. Planning Services, Legal Services and Democratic Services will complete implementation before 31 October. Outstanding applications will be checked against the new scheme, particularly those already expected to go to committee, deferred applications and earlier resolutions subject to a planning obligation or other outstanding action. Transitional instructions will apply the law to those cases and cannot preserve an old decision-making route where it is no longer lawful.
32. Members and officers will receive appropriate briefing, and information will be provided for applicants, agents, parish and town councils and residents.
33. A review after 12 months will consider referral volumes, outcomes and reasons, determination times, committee workload, attendance, quorum and the operation of member requests and local thresholds. It will also consider public access, equality implications and resources, allowing Council to adjust the local arrangements in the light of experience.

Community impact and Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

34. The national requirements are mandatory, but committee size and local triage arrangements remain Council choices. Appendix 6 identifies potential effects and proposed safeguards, including assistance for residents who find written engagement difficult and the continued consideration of material issues irrespective of response numbers. Fewer applications may reach a public meeting at which speaking is available, and that change must be explained accurately.
35. The screening in Appendix 6 is prepared for this report and requires service validation and completion of the Council's normal equality assurance before circulation for decision. Council must consider those implications when settling its local choices; the assessment cannot be deferred until after those choices have been made.

Corporate parenting implications

36. No direct change to the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities is proposed. Applications affecting children, young people or Council services will continue to be

assessed on their individual planning merits through the appropriate decision-making route.

Financial implications

37. Implementation will require officer time for constitutional amendments, records, communication and training. No additional staffing or financial saving from the reduction in membership is proposed in this report. Planning Services have confirmed that the resource implications can be met from existing budgets.

Legal implications

38. The arrangements must comply with the Regulations from 31 October 2026. Determination by the wrong decision-maker could expose an application decision to judicial review. Appendix 1 qualifies the Constitution's general delegation, concurrent, deputy and urgency powers so that they cannot bypass the statutory scheme. It also qualifies paragraph 4.137 of the Member/Officer Relations Protocol to recognise the nominated member's statutory participation in referral assessments, without giving that member authority to determine an application alone. Where officer determination is required, the officer's discretion must not be restricted contrary to regulation 2(2).

Risk assessment

39. The principal risks are incorrect classification, outdated referral procedures, unidentified interests, unavailable nominees and inadequate decision records. The proposed constitutional provisions, substitute nominations, written procedures, training and review address these risks. Completing the political-balance calculation, equality assurance and resource assessment before publication remains part of preparing the report for Council rather than delegated post-decision implementation.

Wards affected and consultation

40. The arrangements apply across all wards. Informal discussions with members and the joint work of Planning Services, Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer have informed the proposals, while the revised Planning Protocol reflects wider member contributions. The final circulation version should record any further group views received without implying that a particular committee size has already been agreed.

Appendices

Appendix 1 — Constitutional amendments for approval

Appendix 2 — Planning Referral and Triage Protocol for approval

Appendix 3 — Implementation Arrangements and Workflow

Appendix 4 — Committee size, political balance and appointments

Appendix 5 — Planning Protocol for approval

Appendix 6 — Equality and poverty screening for service validation before decision

Background papers and references

- Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026, SI 2026/854, regulations 2–7 and Schedules 1–2.
- Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: statutory guidance, especially paragraphs 10, 13–15, 22–26 and 34–35.
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Constitution, October 2025 accessible edition: paragraph 1.37 (printed page 12); paragraphs 2.4(a) and (f) (page 15); paragraphs 2.85–2.91 (pages 37–38); paragraphs 2.141–2.153A (pages 45–47); paragraph 2.158, political-group proper-officer designation (page 52); paragraphs 3.3–3.4 (pages 55–56); paragraphs 3.13–3.16 (pages 57–58); paragraph 3.43(e), (f) and (h); and paragraph 4.137 (page 150).
- Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, SI 1990/1553, regulations 13–15; Local Government and Housing Act 1989, sections 15–17.
- Other relevant legislation and policy: Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025; Town and Country Planning Act 1990; Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992, regulation 10; Equality Act 2010, section 149; the development plan, National Planning Policy Framework and national planning guidance.

Contact Officers

Simon Grundy

Planning Services Manager

Telephone number: 01642 528550

Email: simon.grundy@stockton.gov.uk

Ged Morton

Director of Corporate Services

(Monitoring Officer)

Telephone: 01642 527701

Email: ged.morton@stockton.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Constitutional amendments for approval

Planning Committee functions

The amendments below take effect on 31 October 2026. They replace the conflicting local referral provisions while retaining the committee's other existing functions. The number in paragraph 2.88 must be completed with the figure resolved by Council.

Paragraph	Treatment
2.85(a)	Retain the existing development-plan recommendation function.
2.85(b)	Replace with the provision below.
2.85(c)	Retain the existing power concerning conditions and restrictions, subject to the revised scope of paragraph (b).
2.85(d)	Delete the existing additional local referral triggers.
2.85(e) and 2.86–2.87	Retain the existing plan-making, joint committee and neighbourhood planning functions.
2.88	Insert the membership determined by Council.
2.89 and 2.90	Retain appropriate training and quorum of five.
2.91	Replace the reference to Planning Code with Planning Protocol.

Replacement paragraph 2.85 b

The Planning Committee will discharge the Council's functions as local planning authority by determining applications and associated matters referred to it in accordance with regulation 5(3) or regulation 6(4) of the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 and the Council's Planning Referral and Triage Protocol. It must not determine an application which those Regulations require an officer to determine. Functions outside their scope remain allocated in accordance with the other applicable provisions of the Constitution.

Replacement paragraphs 2.88 and 2.91

2.88 The Planning Committee will comprise [NUMBER RESOLVED BY COUNCIL] councillors and will be politically balanced. A committee determining applications under regulation 5 or 6 of the 2026 Regulations must not comprise more than 13 members.

2.91 The Council Procedure Rules and the Planning Protocol apply to the Planning Committee.

Additional provisions after paragraph 2.91

2.91A Applications will be identified and considered for possible referral in accordance with the Planning Referral and Triage Protocol approved by Full Council. The Protocol forms part of the Council's arrangements for discharging planning functions under regulations 5 and 6, although its detailed provisions are maintained as a separate document.

2.91B The Protocol cannot require or permit determination by the committee contrary to the Regulations. Substantive changes to the local thresholds, counting rules, member-request rights or deadline, own-interest arrangements or allocation of decision-making responsibility require Full Council approval.

2.91C The Monitoring Officer may, following consultation with the Chief Executive, Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth, Planning Services Manager and Head of Legal Services, approve administrative forms, guidance and procedures and minor drafting or consequential amendments. That authority is confined to implementing the substance approved by Council and does not permit alteration of the matters reserved by paragraph 2.91B. Paragraph 1.37 applies to constitutional updating and minor changes, and paragraph 2.148 requires the agreement of both the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer to Local Schemes of Delegation and changes to them.

2.91D Constitutional Interpretation - In the event of any inconsistency between this Constitution, any Local Scheme of Delegation, protocol, guidance note, administrative procedure or other local arrangement and the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026, the Regulations shall prevail and the local provision shall be interpreted and applied accordingly.

Officer determination and statutory nominations

Applications required to be determined by officers under regulations 4, 5(2) and 6(3) are delegated initially to the Planning Services Manager (or such other officer to be determined from time to time by the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth) and such other officers authorised in writing under the relevant local scheme of delegation. Applicable requirements for approval and recording of sub-delegations continue to apply. The officer determining an application must have no disqualifying interest or conflicting responsibility.

Nominated Officer and Nominated Member

The nominated member shall be the Chair of the Planning Committee. The substitute nominated member shall be the Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee.

The nominated officer shall be a suitably qualified senior planning officer designated in writing by the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth. The Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth may revoke, amend or replace that designation at any time. The Monitoring Officer shall maintain a register of current designations.

Qualification of the general delegation provisions

The general provisions governing officer delegation, including paragraphs 2.141–2.153A, operate subject to the 2026 Regulations. They do not authorise Council or a committee to take back, exercise concurrently or receive for determination an application which the Regulations require an officer to determine, or permit referral outside regulations 5 and 6. General deputy arrangements and the urgency power cannot displace the statutory requirements governing who may undertake referral assessment or determine an application.

No arrangement may restrict the determining officer's discretion contrary to regulation 2(2). Consultation with a member does not give that member authority to approve, direct or prevent the officer's decision. These provisions do not authorise expenditure outside the Council's financial arrangements. The statutory nominated-person functions may be exercised only by a formally nominated person or substitute; they do not pass to another officer merely through a general cascade or concurrent delegation.

Member and officer relations

Add the following qualification at the end of paragraph 4.137 of the Member/Officer Relations Protocol:

For planning applications governed by the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026, the nominated member or formally nominated substitute may participate with the nominated officer or formally nominated substitute in the statutory referral assessment under regulation 5 or 6. This is a specific statutory referral function, not a power for an individual member to determine the application or direct its outcome. The application must be determined by the committee or an authorised officer in accordance with the Regulations.

Committee substitutes

Retain paragraphs 3.13–3.16. Substitution must preserve political composition, the substitute must have received the required training, the ordinary member must be absent for the whole meeting and notification must be given before or on the meeting day. A substitute does not acquire special powers of the member replaced under paragraph 3.15. Acting as a committee substitute, or chairing a particular meeting, does not by itself confer the separately nominated statutory referral role.

Appendix 2

Planning Referral and Triage Protocol

1 Purpose and status

- 1.1 This Protocol identifies the applications to be considered by the nominated officer and nominated member for possible committee referral. Approved by Full Council and incorporated into the constitutional framework by reference, it implements the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026. It does not change the statutory categories or create an automatic right to committee determination.
- 1.2 The Regulations prevail over inconsistent local provisions and the relevant statutory guidance must be taken into account. Functions outside the Regulations remain subject to the other applicable constitutional provisions. The Planning Protocol separately deals with conduct and good decision-making.

2 Nominated persons and cover

- 2.1 The nominated officer shall be the suitably qualified senior planning officer designated in writing by the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth. The Chair of the Planning Committee shall be the nominated member. The Vice-Chair shall be the substitute nominated member. Substitutes may act where a nominated individual is absent, unavailable or unable to participate because of an interest or conflict. They must not be used to secure a different assessment from that which might otherwise have been reached. Where a further nomination is required, it must be made through a lawful nomination process before the statutory assessment function is exercised
- 2.2 Substitutes may act for absence, unavailability or an interest or conflict. They must not be used to obtain a different assessment from the principal nominee. Where neither principal nor substitute can act, the Monitoring Officer must arrange a further lawful nomination through Council or an express delegated power before the statutory assessment is undertaken. Absence of a nominee does not itself establish disagreement on referral. Ordinary committee substitution under paragraphs 3.13–3.16 does not confer this statutory role; paragraph 3.15 prevents a substitute from inheriting the special powers of the person replaced.

3 Classification and officer authority

- 3.1 Planning Services will record the statutory classification, applying regulation 2 and Schedules 1 and 2. Own-interest applications follow regulation 6; where an application otherwise falls within both schedules, the Schedule 2 category takes precedence. The statutory definitions of householder, minor commercial, minor residential and large outline permission apply without substitution of the local triage thresholds.

- 3.2 A Schedule 1 application must be determined by an authorised officer. A Schedule 2 application not referred under regulation 5(3), and an own-interest application not referred under regulation 6(4), must likewise be determined by an officer. The determining officer's discretion must not be restricted contrary to regulation 2(2).
- 3.3 Classification checks must include connections with listed building consent, section 73A applications, the original permission relevant to a section 73 sequence and the approval connected with a section 106A request or application. Reserved matters relating to a large outline permission are in Schedule 2; the statutory definition concerns outline permission for at least 500 dwellings or at least 50,000 square metres of new building floorspace. A referral assessment cannot reopen issues already settled by the outline permission.

4 Schedule 2 local criteria

- 4.1 A Schedule 2 application will receive a referral assessment where one or more of the following applies:
- a. More than 10 qualifying individual letters or emails express a view contrary to the case officer's proposed recommendation.
 - b. A full or outline application exceeds 50 dwellings.
 - c. A full or outline application exceeds 2,000 square metres of gross commercial floorspace.
 - d. A full or outline application exceeds 1,000 square metres of gross retail floorspace.
 - e. An application seeks listed building consent concerning a Grade I or Grade II* building, excluding applications solely concerned with the variation or discharge of conditions.
 - f. A member has made a valid request under section 5.
 - g. The nominated officer considers that the application may raise an issue within regulation 5(3), despite falling outside the preceding criteria.
- 4.2 These thresholds require an assessment, not committee determination. Both nominees must still agree that the statutory gateway is met and that the application should be referred. A proposal exactly at a stated development threshold does not meet that numerical criterion, although another route may apply.
- 4.3 Advertisement and tree preservation order consent applications are excluded from criterion 4.1(a), but remain eligible under the other applicable routes. Similarly, exclusion of listed building condition applications from criterion 4.1(e) does not remove their Schedule 2 status. Own-interest cases are considered under section 8 rather than the Schedule 2 gateway.

5 Member requests

- 5.1 Any councillor may request consideration of an eligible Schedule 2 application within 21 days of publication of its details. The prescribed form, or equivalent written information, must identify the application, material planning grounds, their local significance and any relevant policies or supporting evidence. A statement of support or opposition without planning grounds is insufficient.
- 5.2 A valid request will be considered by the nominated officer and nominated member, who will apply the statutory test. The requesting member will receive the outcome and reasons. Neither the request nor an approach to a director confers a right to committee determination, and there is no separate local override of the nominees' statutory assessment.
- 5.3 Late requests do not ordinarily trigger assessment under this section. Where new or materially changed information emerges before determination, the nominated officer may use criterion 4.1(g). This does not prevent any material representation received before determination from being considered in the planning decision, whether or not referral is assessed.

6 Counting representations

- 6.1 A qualifying representation is a written response from an individual or organisation expressing a view contrary to the proposed case-officer recommendation. Repeated responses from the same person count once. Responses from a single postal address ordinarily count once unless they clearly represent independently expressed views of different occupants. A representation on behalf of an organisation counts as one organisational response.
- 6.2 A petition counts as one response for the numerical trigger. Substantially identical standard or pro-forma responses also count as one for that purpose, while any materially different content must be considered. The number of signatories and responses must still be recorded and reported accurately, and all material issues considered irrespective of the counting rules.
- 6.3 These rules concern triage only and do not determine the planning weight of an issue. Officers will review the numerical criterion when the recommendation is formulated or materially changes, so that the direction of representations is assessed against the actual proposed recommendation.

7 Schedule 2 gateway assessment

- 7.1 The nominees may agree to referral where, in their view, the application raises one or more economic, social or environmental issues of significance to the local area, or one or more significant planning matters having regard to the development plan and other material considerations. They must have regard to the statutory guidance, including its presumption of officer determination and exceptional committee referral.

- 7.2 The assessment may take place at a meeting or through written or electronic communication. Each nominee must consider the relevant information and record their view. They should make every effort to reach agreement and may obtain further reasonably necessary information before completing the assessment, identifying responsibility and avoiding unnecessary delay.
- 7.3 Where both agree, the application will be referred. Where agreement to referral is not reached, it must be determined by an officer. Neither nominee has a casting vote and neither may independently require committee determination.

8 Own interest applications

- 8.1 The statutory definition in regulation 6 applies. It covers applications of a kind specified in either schedule made, alone or jointly, by or on behalf of the Council, a Council member or a Council officer. It also covers cases where, in the view of the nominees, the Council or any of its members or officers otherwise has an interest. Application information and relevant disclosures will be checked so that such cases can be identified.
- 8.2 All identified own-interest applications will be placed before the nominees. They will consider whether committee referral is appropriate, having regard to the statutory guidance, transparency, propriety and the circumstances. The Schedule 2 significance test does not apply; agreement is nevertheless required. If referral is not agreed, an authorised officer must determine the application.
- 8.3 Routine or minor Council development may be suitable for officer determination but remains an own-interest application where the statutory definition is met. An employee's seniority or familiarity to Planning Services does not remove an application from the definition. A spouse, partner or family connection must be assessed on its facts, including whether a member or officer otherwise has an interest.
- 8.4 Interested or conflicted individuals must take no part in referral assessment or determination. Council applications must also comply with regulation 10 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992 concerning responsibility for management of the land or buildings. Legal advice will be obtained where the separation of functions or an interest requires clarification.

9 Records and publication

- 9.1 Every completed assessment will record the application, statutory category, local criterion, nominees and any substitutes, interests considered, relevant information, each nominee's view, outcome and reasons. Where further information is needed, the interim record will identify what is required and who will obtain it; the final assessment will be retained with the application record.
- 9.2 Outcomes and reasons will be published subject to applicable restrictions on personal, confidential and privileged information. Both agreed and declined referrals will be included in a quarterly summary to the Planning Committee. The Monitoring Officer may approve the precise form and administrative arrangements, but not remove these requirements.

10 Implementation and amendment

10.1 This Protocol takes effect on 31 October 2026 and will be reviewed after 12 months.

Internal circulation arrangements, forms, publication mechanics and guidance may be finalised by the Monitoring Officer within Council's implementation delegation.

10.2 Substantive changes to the thresholds, counting rules, member-request rights or deadline, own-interest arrangements or allocation of decision-making responsibility require Council approval. Administrative changes cannot alter the statutory tests, confer an automatic committee referral or restrict an officer's lawful discretion.

Appendix 3

Implementation Arrangements and Workflow

(NOTE: Status of this Appendix - This Appendix is provided for explanatory purposes only)

Council is being asked to approve the substantive governance arrangements contained within Appendices 1, 2 and 5. The workflow, publication arrangements and implementation processes described below illustrate how those arrangements are intended to operate in practice.

Guidance notes, workflow records, publication arrangements, templates and other administrative documents are operational documents and may be amended from time to time by officers, provided that no amendment changes a substantive arrangement approved by Council.

At classification, Planning Services first identifies whether an application falls within the Regulations and whether it is an own-interest application. Own-interest applications proceed to the separate regulation 6 assessment. Other Schedule 1 applications proceed to officer determination, while Schedule 2 applications are checked against the approved local criteria. Functions outside the Regulations follow their existing lawful allocation.

Where a Schedule 2 criterion is met, the nominees assess the statutory gateway and whether referral is appropriate. For an own-interest case, they consider referral under regulation 6 without the Schedule 2 gateway. If more information is required it is obtained before completion; agreement results in committee referral and absence of agreement results in officer determination. The outcome is recorded, published and communicated to a requesting member where applicable.

Route	Assessment	Final decision maker
Schedule 1 and not own interest	No local committee referral assessment	Authorised officer
Schedule 2 with no local criterion	Local screening recorded	Authorised officer
Schedule 2 meeting a local criterion	Both nominees apply regulation 5 and decide referral	Committee if referral agreed; otherwise officer
Own interest	Both nominees consider regulation 6 referral	Committee if referral agreed; otherwise officer
Outside the Regulations	Existing constitutional allocation	Relevant authorised decision maker

Appendix 4

Committee size political balance and appointments

The allocations shown in this Appendix are illustrative only and are based upon the political composition of the Council at the time of publication.

Final allocations will be confirmed by Democratic Services following Council's determination of committee size.

1 Decision on size

Council will determine the actual membership, within the statutory maximum of 13 and with the proposed quorum of five. The decision should reflect effective operation, representation, experience, likely workload and resilience for absence and interests.

Neither the Regulations nor this report prescribes a preferred number below the maximum. The decision should reflect effective operation, representation, experience, likely workload and resilience for absence and interests.

2 Indicative allocations

The following figures have been supplied for the options discussed. They are indicative pending Democratic Services' confirmation against the Council's current group membership and the allocation across its ordinary committees. The allocation approved at the meeting must follow that confirmation.

Committee size	Conservative	Labour	TIA	IBIS
Existing formal allocation of 14	6	6	1	1
13	6	5	1	1
9	4	4	1	0

The present additional Conservative appointment followed IBIS not nominating to its allocated seat. It does not create an entitlement on the reconstituted committee. If a nine-member allocation without an IBIS seat is confirmed, there is no IBIS vacancy; if an IBIS seat is allocated, the group must again have the opportunity to nominate.

3 Other size options and readiness for the meeting

Democratic Services should prepare calculations for other realistic sizes before the meeting, together with any consequential effect on other committees. No unverified allocations for 10, 11 or 12 members are assumed here. If a different size is proposed, Council must receive and confirm the corresponding calculation before appointments; a short adjournment may be necessary if the calculation is not immediately available.

Groups may provide conditional nominations for the realistic alternatives. Such nominations assist the meeting but do not predetermine its choice. Members must satisfy the existing training requirements before sitting, and Council should consider whether an intended nominee is able to meet those requirements by commencement. Committee substitutes remain available under paragraphs 3.13–3.16: the proper officer may consider a request that preserves political composition, the substitute must have relevant training, the ordinary member must be absent for the whole meeting and notification must be given before or on the meeting day. This does not allow substitution for an individual application or confer a nominated-member referral role.

4 Sequence and effective date

Council will determine size, approve the corresponding political allocation, appoint available group nominees and elect the Chair and Vice-Chair. These appointments will take effect on 31 October 2026, alongside the new scheme. The present committee continues until then, and statutory notices can be issued following the September allocation decision. The summons will expressly include determination of committee size and political allocation, appointment of members and the Chair and Vice-Chair, constitutional amendments and approval of the protocols. Proposals made at the meeting must fall within that advertised business.

5 Outstanding nominations and unfilled seats

The proper officer will notify each group's leader, or deputy leader in the leader's absence, in writing under regulation 14 as soon as practicable after the allocation. Wishes must be communicated by a person or group statement authorised under regulation 13. Available valid nominations may be given effect at the meeting. Any outstanding permanent appointments will be brought back to Full Council. Administrative authority to receive a nomination is not, by itself, authority to make the appointment. Paragraph 2.158 expressly designates the Head of Democratic Services for receiving political-group wishes and notifying allocations; it does not expressly grant a general power to make permanent committee appointments.

Where a group has failed to express its wishes within three weeks beginning with the date of the regulation 14 notice, regulation 15 permits Council to make such appointment as it thinks fit. The period begins with that notice, not an informal discussion or advance indication. The precise content of an express refusal, or a nomination received before an alternative appointment, will be considered by the Monitoring Officer under the statutory provisions before advice is given on the next step.

Under the process proposed in this report, a group's indication that it does not intend to nominate will not result in immediate redistribution at the meeting. Any alternative appointment will be brought to Full Council after confirmation that the statutory requirements have been met. The seat will not pass automatically to another group and a contested appointment will be determined through the Council's voting procedure.

An allocated seat may remain temporarily unfilled without preventing the committee from operating, provided the meeting is quorate and participating members are eligible. This

report does not propose separate alternative political-balance arrangements in place of the ordinary statutory allocation and nomination process.

Appendix 5

Planning Protocol

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Protocol is primarily intended for members of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Planning Committee and offers practical advice and support when handling planning matters. Its objective is to promote lawful decision-making and minimise the risk of legal challenge. It does not supplement, override or amend the Members' Code of Conduct and should be read alongside that Code, the Council Procedure Rules and the Planning Referral and Triage Protocol.

2 Roles and responsibilities

- 2.1 Members and officers have distinct but complementary responsibilities. Members may become involved as ward representatives or as Planning Committee members and should consider whether their involvement in a particular application could affect, or reasonably appear to affect, their ability to determine it impartially. Merely receiving representations or representing a ward does not automatically prevent participation.
- 2.2 Ward members who are not sitting on the committee can represent their constituents' interests, attend as observers and speak in accordance with the public-speaking arrangements. They may participate in appropriate pre-application engagement, consultation on draft heads of terms for planning obligations and officer briefings. They must distinguish their representative role from the statutory role of the decision-maker.
- 2.3 A ward member appointed to the Planning Committee must remain open-minded. Where the member wishes to act as an advocate for a particular outcome, they should seek advice about whether they can also participate in determination; where possible, referring constituents to another ward member may preserve that separation. Advice should be sought from the Monitoring Officer or committee legal adviser where the position is uncertain.
- 2.4 Members determining an application must consider its planning merits, exercise judgment and decide on material planning considerations. Applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant Local Plan policies, National Planning Policy Framework, other guidance, representations and professional advice must be considered; non-planning matters must not influence the decision.
- 2.5 Officers provide professional support and advice so that decisions are evidence-based and legally sound, and identify the consequences of proposed decisions. They also determine applications under delegated authority. The determining officer retains responsibility for the professional judgment and decision, and consultation with a member does not transfer that responsibility.

3 Predetermination and bias

- 3.1 Members must remain genuinely willing to consider the application, evidence, representations and advice before deciding. An initial view or predisposition does not, by itself, amount to predetermination, but a closed mind may prevent lawful participation. Members must also avoid actual bias or circumstances giving rise to a reasonable appearance of bias, and seek advice where previous involvement may cause difficulty.
- 3.2 Training and supporting guidance on predetermination, bias and interests will be provided. Members should obtain advice at an early stage so that any necessary arrangements for speaking as a ward representative, withdrawing or using a substitute can be made in accordance with the Constitution.

4 Applications involving members officers or the Council

- 4.1 Proposals involving the Council, members or officers must be handled transparently. Relevant interests must be disclosed promptly, and an interested or conflicted member or officer must not participate in the referral assessment or determination. Whether an application is an own-interest application and whether it is referred are matters for regulation 6 and the Planning Referral and Triage Protocol.
- 4.2 Own-interest status does not automatically require committee determination. Referral requires the nominated officer and nominated member to agree; otherwise an authorised officer must determine the application. Applications made by the Council must also comply with the applicable separation of land-management and planning decision-making responsibilities.
- 4.3 A member or officer who is an applicant or has an interest must not improperly influence the assessment or decision. They may use the same opportunities as other applicants to provide relevant information or respond to issues. Officers must declare relevant outside interests and avoid involvement where a conflict arises.

5 Briefings and contact with applicants and developers

- 5.1 Pre-application discussions can clarify policy and technical requirements and identify improvements. Appropriate engagement between members, applicants and communities is encouraged, provided that no commitment to a decision is given or implied. Members should direct technical requests to officers and explain that an eventual decision will follow the formal planning process and consideration of all material matters.
- 5.2 Planning Committee members should not attend a private meeting with an applicant, developer or objector about a live or prospective application without an appropriate officer present. This does not prevent ordinary constituent contact, but members should avoid commitments and report material information to Planning Services. A written record should be kept of material arranged meetings and discussions involving officers and members.
- 5.3 Pre-committee briefings may be arranged for all committee members where useful for a large, complex or potentially contentious application or a relevant policy issue. They are

for information and clarification, not preliminary decisions or agreement on voting intentions. Substantive committee debate and determination must take place at the formal meeting, subject to the ordinary access-to-information rules.

5.4 Briefings may help members identify information needed for the eventual meeting and allow officers time to address reasonable requests in the report. They must not become an unpublished substitute for committee deliberation. Material information necessary to the decision should be made available through the proper application and committee reporting process.

5.5 Pre-application briefings involving officers, developers, members and relevant stakeholders may support constructive early dialogue and refinement of proposals. A written record should be shared with attendees. Such briefings are not Planning Committee meetings and confer no assurance of permission; a subsequent application will be determined through the national scheme and applicable constitutional arrangements.

5.6 A member's absence from a pre-application briefing does not prevent participation in the eventual determination. Attendance also does not, by itself, prevent participation, although the member must remain open-minded and consider any interest, bias or predetermination issue arising from what was said or done.

6 Committee consideration and member requests

6.1 Applications and associated consents will be determined under the national scheme, Constitution and Planning Referral and Triage Protocol. Within the Regulations, committee determination requires lawful referral under regulation 5 or 6. Functions outside their scope follow the existing applicable allocation; neither this Protocol nor a general constitutional referral power overrides a mandatory officer route.

6.2 A member may request consideration of an eligible Schedule 2 application through the approved procedure, ordinarily within 21 days of publication of the application details. The request must explain the planning grounds and significance and does not guarantee referral. The nominees will record the outcome and reasons and inform the requesting member; there is no independent director-level override of their assessment.

7 Planning Committee meetings

7.1 Regular attendance is important for informed decisions and familiarity with planning policy and practice. Members should read the report and updates before the meeting and, where possible, raise factual questions in advance so that accurate information can be provided. Only members who satisfy the Constitution's training requirements may sit. Substitution must comply with paragraphs 3.13–3.16, including the requirements for training, preservation of political composition, whole-meeting absence and notification; a substitute does not inherit special powers attached to the member replaced.

7.2 The Chair is responsible for the orderly conduct of the meeting and for helping members obtain advice, debate relevant issues and reach a clear resolution. Members not sitting

on the committee may attend or speak in accordance with the public-speaking arrangements, which will be explained in supporting guidance.

- 7.3 If an application is deferred, the committee must identify and record the planning reason and the information or action needed before reconsideration. Deferral should assist proper consideration and should not simply avoid a difficult decision. The reason should be sufficiently clear for officers and the applicant to understand what is required.

8 Decisions different from the officer recommendation

- 8.1 Members may reach a different planning judgment from the officer recommendation after considering the development plan, material considerations, evidence and advice. Such a decision must be supported by clear planning reasons explaining the outcome. A disagreement with professional advice is not itself improper, but the committee must be able to identify the evidence and planning basis for its conclusion.
- 8.2 Where members appear minded to take a different decision, the Chair will seek planning and legal advice and help formulate a clear proposed resolution. For refusal, the grounds should identify the relevant harm, policies and other material considerations. For approval, they should explain the basis for departing from the recommendation and identify necessary conditions and planning obligations. Reasons must be clear before the final vote.
- 8.3 The committee will decide whether further evidence or advice makes deferral necessary. The Chair and officers advise on that decision; they do not independently impose deferral. Where deferred, the resolution must record the committee's provisional grounds so that officers can prepare a further report evaluating the evidence, policy basis, legal robustness, appeal risks and potential costs.
- 8.4 That report will normally return to the next available meeting, although external legal or technical advice may require more time. Having considered it, the committee must resolve how to determine the application and identify its final planning reasons before voting. The resolution and decision notice must accurately reflect the decision and any authorised detailed drafting.

9 Appeals following decisions contrary to advice

- 9.1 Members may have an important role in explaining the committee's judgment where its decision is appealed, including attendance at a hearing or inquiry. For written-representation appeals, officers will prepare the Council's statement using the recorded reasons and supporting evidence and may share a draft with relevant members to confirm that it accurately represents the committee's position.
- 9.2 Officers will respect lawful committee decisions and provide appropriate procedural and technical support. Professional officers must nevertheless exercise independent professional judgment and cannot be required to give evidence or subscribe to statements contrary to their genuine professional opinions. Supporting the Council's case does not remove those obligations.

- 9.3 Where an officer cannot properly present the Council's position because of a professional conflict, the Council will consider suitable external planning, legal or specialist assistance. The support will reflect the issues, available evidence, proportionality and approved resources. Members will be advised of the role they may need to play and assisted in preparing relevant evidence.

10 Site visits

- 10.1 A site visit may assist where the site or its relationship with surrounding land cannot adequately be understood from reports, plans, photographs or the presentation. Members may view publicly accessible sites or surroundings themselves, but must not enter private land without permission or engage in lobbying discussions. Material information obtained must be disclosed through the proper process.
- 10.2 A formal visit may be requested with a member referral request, explaining why it would assist, or by the committee when considering an application. A request does not itself secure committee referral. Where a visit is agreed, its planning purpose and any deferral reason must be recorded, along with the requesting member where applicable.
- 10.3 At an organised visit, officers will explain the proposals and relevant viewpoints. Members may seek factual clarification but must not debate the merits or indicate a voting intention. The Chair will maintain that distinction, and applicants or interested parties must not lobby members; any arranged opportunity to provide information must be managed fairly.

11 Member training

- 11.1 Members must complete the training required by the Constitution before participating in determination, and attendance records will be maintained. Refresher and specialist training will cover relevant changes in planning law and policy, the national scheme, material considerations, interests, bias, predetermination and appeal risks.
- 11.2 Members should identify areas in which they need further support and maintain their knowledge throughout their appointment. These local requirements continue to apply independently of any separately commenced national training or certification requirements.

12 Review and amendment

- 12.1 The Director of Corporate Services will review the Protocol in consultation with the Planning Committee, Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth, Planning Services Manager and Head of Legal Services. The initial review will form part of the 12-month review of the new arrangements.
- 12.2 Substantive amendments affecting member rights, committee procedure or allocation of decision-making responsibility require Full Council approval. Minor drafting, updating and cross-reference changes and supporting administrative guidance may be settled under the express delegation approved by Council, without altering the substance of this Protocol. Constitutional updating must also comply with paragraph 1.37, including

consultation with the Chief Executive, and changes to Local Schemes of Delegation require the agreement of the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer under paragraph 2.148.

Appendix 6

Equality and poverty screening

Status and purpose

This screening accompanies the proposed national-scheme implementation, local triage arrangements, committee reconstitution and Planning Protocol. It identifies potential impacts and safeguards for service validation and completion of the Council's normal equality assurance before circulation for decision. It is not a record of completed consultation or an assertion that a full impact assessment has already been signed off.

The national allocation of specified planning decisions is mandatory, but committee size, local thresholds and referral procedures remain local choices. The Council must consider the equality implications of those choices when making them. The screening should be revisited if members materially change the proposals, with further advice available before the decision where necessary.

People affected and available information

The arrangements affect applicants, residents, organisations, parish and town councils, councillors and officers across the Borough. They may particularly affect people who need assistance with written or digital processes, including some disabled residents, people with limited literacy or English language skills, and people experiencing poverty or digital exclusion. No completed demographic analysis or consultation dataset has been provided for this screening, so the effects below are potential impacts requiring proportionate validation.

Potential effects and safeguards

Potential effect	Proposed safeguard
Fewer applications at meetings with public speaking	Clear explanation of the change, assistance with representations and a reasoned member-request route for eligible cases.
Difficulty preparing written or digital representations	Accessible guidance, reasonable adjustments and an alternative supported method of communicating representations where required.
Numerical thresholds may disadvantage a small or less organised community	All material issues considered; member requests and the nominated officer's significant-case route do not depend on a minimum number of responses.

Potential effect	Proposed safeguard
Petition, template or shared-address counting may obscure community views	Counts apply only to triage; actual response totals and material issues remain accurately recorded and reported.
Smaller membership reduces resilience or breadth of participation	Council considers representation, attendance, interests and quorum; training and a 12-month review assess practical effects.
Residents do not understand why a case was not referred	Published outcomes and reasons, notification to requesting members and accessible public guidance.

Poverty and participation

Residents with limited resources may have less access to professional advice, reliable internet or time to organise collective responses. The scheme must not equate the volume or sophistication of correspondence with the planning importance of an issue. Assistance and member engagement should help residents identify relevant concerns, while officers continue to assess material matters independently of the response count.

Completion before Council

Planning Services, Democratic Services and where applicable the appropriate equality adviser should validate the likely effects using available service information, recent committee cases, relevant complaints and accessibility experience. The report should record that assurance, any further mitigation and whether a fuller assessment is required. Resource implications of assistance and publication should also be confirmed. These are pre-decision checks rather than matters to be left to the implementation delegation after adoption.

Monitoring and review

The 12-month review should examine use and outcomes of member requests, distribution of referrals, the effects of the counting rules, requests for assistance, public participation and complaints about access. Relevant geographical or demographic information should be considered where available and proportionate, without collecting unnecessary personal data. Evidence of adverse effects should lead to operational improvements within the approved framework or proposals to Council for substantive change.

Provisional assessment

The proposed safeguards address identifiable risks to participation, but a definitive conclusion on local equality and poverty effects depends on the service validation described

above. Council should have the resulting advice before settling the local arrangements, and any material amendment at the meeting should be considered in that context.

