



For decision

Title: Update of Planning Committee Standing Orders
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Purpose

This paper seeks approval of proposed updates to the Planning Committee Standing Orders.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- a) Consider the proposed changes to the Planning Committee Standing Orders; and
- b) Agree updated Planning Committee Standing Orders

Background and strategic context

1. The Planning Committee Standing Orders outline the procedures which apply to meetings of the Park Authority's Planning Committee. The current Planning Committee Standing Orders were adopted in September 2019.
2. Updated Standing Orders for meetings of the Park Authority's Board were adopted in November 2024, and it is necessary to review the Planning Committee Standing Orders to ensure consistency between the two sets of procedures. The current Planning Committee Standing Orders also pre-date the significant changes to working practices which were introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic and which have been maintained subsequently – for example, online and hybrid meetings. There is a need to review the Committee Standing Orders to reflect these and other changes to working practices in the intervening period. A review of the Committee Standing Orders also provides an opportunity to consider other procedural changes which may be of benefit to users of the planning system.



Proposals

3. Table 1 overleaf sets out the sub-headings in the existing Planning Committee Standing Orders and identifies a summary of, and justification for, the changes that are proposed under each sub-heading. An informal discussion on the Standing Orders was held with the Planning Committee on 13 June 2025 and the proposed changes aim, as far as possible, to reflect the views expressed during that discussion.

Table 1: Summary of proposed changes to Planning Committee Standing Orders

Sub-heading title	Proposed change/s	Reason/s
Frequency and location of meetings	Update meeting frequency from four to six weekly. Clarify that special meetings may be called by the Committee Convener when it appears that an item of business requires urgent attention. Clarify that committee meetings will normally be held in hybrid format from the Park Authority's offices in Grantown-on-Spey, but that committee meetings may be held in-person at a location close to the site of proposed developments that raise issues of particular significance. Delete reference to cancellation of meetings due to adverse weather circumstances.	To reflect current working practices. To ensure consistency with Board Standing Orders. To reflect current working practices in relation to hybrid meetings whilst providing scope for in-person meetings in certain circumstances (see further comments in paras 6 – 11). To reflect capability to hold meetings in hybrid / online form.



Sub-heading title	Proposed change/s	Reason/s
Pre-agenda briefing meetings	Minor updates for clarification but no significant changes.	Existing arrangements remain valid.
Notice of meetings	Minor change to remove reference to display of meeting notices in local authority offices, as this is now done online. No other significant changes.	Existing arrangements remain valid.
Agenda papers	Clarify that, as well as being sent to Board members, all agenda papers are published online seven days before each meeting other than where there are confidentiality considerations.	To fully reflect current working practices.
Quorum	Clarify that quorum requirements apply irrespective of any vacancies in membership and outline the procedures that apply if the number of members reduces below quorum during a meeting – for example, due to members leaving the meeting because of declarations of interest.	To ensure consistency with Board Standing Orders.
Planning applications: written representations	Allow longer periods for written representations where possible. The current Planning Committee Standing Orders only allow representations received in writing within 28 days of call-in to be included in committee papers. In practice, there is usually scope to include representations received after this date in committee papers, and a change is proposed to enable this. A minimum period of 28 days for written representations will be	To provide scope for considering written representations which would not be permitted under the existing Planning Committee Standing Orders.



Sub-heading title	Proposed change/s	Reason/s
	retained, and a new a cut-off point beyond which representations cannot be included in committee papers is proposed (21 days prior to the date on which the application will be reported to committee). This change will allow a longer period for written representations for most planning applications.	
Planning applications: oral representations	Minor updates for clarification but no significant changes.	Existing arrangements remain valid.
Written and oral representations on other agenda items	Minor updates for clarification but no significant changes.	Existing arrangements remain valid.
Site visits	<p>Retain the ability for Committee Members to propose a motion for a site visit where they deem this necessary for the effective determination of a planning application but clarify that the normal process is for the Planning Convener / Deputy Convener, in consultation with the Head of Planning, to identify instances where site visits are required and arrange these in advance of committee meetings.</p> <p>Introduce a mandatory requirement for member attendance at site visits</p>	<p>To reflect current working practices on advance identification of planning applications requiring site visits.</p> <p>To respond to views expressed during the informal discussion on Committee Standing Orders.</p>



Sub-heading title	Proposed change/s	Reason/s
	that are identified and arranged in advance of a planning application being considered at planning committee, but retain the non-mandatory status of site visits that are agreed in response to a member motion.	
How motions and amendments are moved and decided on	Minor updates for clarification but no significant changes.	Existing arrangements remain valid.
What happens if votes are equal?	Minor updates for clarification but no significant changes.	Existing arrangements remain valid.
Adjourning a meeting	Minor updates for clarification but no significant changes.	Existing arrangements remain valid.
Delegation of responsibilities	For clarity, include a reference to monitoring and enforcement processes (except those which involve serving formal enforcement notices), and the negotiation and conclusion of section 75 legal agreements post-Committee in the section on operational decision-making.	To reflect established working practices.

4. Although there was general agreement on most of the proposed changes to the Committee Standing Orders during the informal discussion on 13 June 2025, there was no clear consensus on the following points:
- a) Whether committee meetings should continue to be held in hybrid format from the Park Authority's office at Grantown-on-Spey or revert to the pre-Covid format of being in-person only and moving around different locations across the National Park.



- b) Whether or not member attendance at planning site visits should be made mandatory.

5. A more detailed justification for the proposals in respect of these two issues is provided below.

Format and location of meetings

6. To help inform decision making on meeting format and location, a cost comparison exercise has been undertaken by the Clerk to the Board – see Table 2 below. The table shows cost estimates for typical hybrid and in-person meetings based at the Park Authority's office at Grantown-on-Spey and a typical in-person meeting held elsewhere in the National Park (using Ballater as an example).

Table 2: Cost comparisons between different meeting formats

Hybrid (Hosted from Grantown)		In-person (Grantown)		In-person (Ballater)	
Accommodation	£120	Accommodation	£360	Accommodation	£1,560
Room Hire	£0	Room Hire	£0	Room Hire	£270
Evening Meal	£30	Evening Meal	£90	Evening Meal	£390
Catering	£300	Catering	£445	Catering	£695
Travel Expenses	£185	Travel Expenses	£625	Travel Expenses	£625
Total Cost	£635	Total Cost	£1,520	Total Cost	£3,540

7. Over the course of a year, during which there would normally be at least seven committee meetings, hybrid meetings hosted from Grantown would be expected to cost approximately £4,500, in-person meetings held at Grantown would be expected to cost approximately £10,500, and in-person meetings held elsewhere in the National Park would be expected to cost approximately £24,500.
8. In light of the National Park Partnership Plan objectives / targets on net zero and carbon neutrality for the National Park, the Clerk to the Board has also undertaken a comparison exercise to assess the estimated carbon emissions associated with different meeting formats – see Table 3 below for a summary of these estimates.



Table 3: Estimated carbon emission comparisons between different meeting formats

	Hybrid (Hosted from Grantown)	In-person (Grantown)	In-person (Ballater)
Estimated CO ₂ emissions per meeting	110kg	372kg	424kg

9. In the context of current budget constraints and objectives / targets around net zero and carbon neutrality for the National Park, the additional financial and carbon costs associated with returning to in-person only meetings and / or regularly moving the planning committee to different locations across the National Park are likely to be difficult to justify. It is therefore considered appropriate that most planning committee meetings should continue to be held in hybrid format from the Park Authority's Grantown-on-Spey office. The proposed updates to the Committee Standing Orders reflect this.
10. However, there is likely to be scope to vary this approach when determining planning applications that raise issues of particular significance – for example, applications that are recommended for approval and are considered to be departures from the development plan. Such applications generally represent a small proportion of our overall application caseload, and it is considered reasonable to hold the planning committee meeting in a location close to the site of the proposed development, and to require member attendance in person, in these rare instances. Again, the proposed updates to the Committee Standing Orders reflect this.
11. To ensure the ongoing effective operation of hybrid meetings, general etiquette guidance on hybrid meeting attendance is also proposed within the updated Committee Standing Orders. This includes a general expectation that members attending meetings online should keep their camera on whenever possible, as this is helpful for both officers presenting reports and applicants / members of the public addressing the committee, and it also assists the Planning Convener to identify members who wish to ask questions.



Site visit attendance

12. The existing Planning Committee Standing Orders state that any member may propose a motion for a site visit where they consider it necessary for the effective determination of a planning application. Such a motion can only be proposed after the planning officer's presentation on the application has been made to the committee and any points of clarification have been dealt with.
13. As summarised in Table 1, changes are proposed to the Committee Standing Orders to make it clear that in most cases the need for a site visit will be identified in advance of an application being presented to the committee (through agreement between the Planning Convener / Deputy Convener and the Head of Planning). This practice has already been operating for several years but it is important that the Committee Standing Orders are updated to reflect it. Such site visits are relatively rare, and they are generally limited to planning applications that raise issues of particular significance. It is likely that many of these cases will be the same as those for which it is proposed to hold the committee meeting in a location close to the site of the proposed development and to require member attendance in person (see paragraph 10 above). As such, it is considered reasonable that attendance at these site visits should be made mandatory, and the proposed updates to the Committee Standing Orders reflect this.
14. The existing ability for members to propose a motion for a site visit on any other planning application will be retained, and the existing non-mandatory nature of attendance at any such site visit will also be retained. This is because in such cases the application will have already been deemed as capable of determination by the committee, and the process of consideration will have started. In such instances, if a deferral for a site visit is agreed, it is reasonable that not all members may feel the need to understand the specifics of a site by way of a visit.

Next steps

15. Following agreement by Planning Committee, the updated Planning Committee Standing Orders will be presented for formal approval at the next meeting of the Park Authority's Board.



Strategic risk management

16. Maintaining up to date Planning Committee Standing Orders will help to mitigate the risk of successful legal challenge to decisions of the Park Authority's Planning Committee on a procedural basis.

Implications

17. Resource implications associated with specific aspects of the Standing Orders are highlighted in paragraphs 6 to 9 above (with respect to Planning Committee format and location). There are no other direct resource implications associated with this item of business.

Supporting information

18. The proposed amendments to the Planning Committee Standing Orders agreed in 2019 are set out in Appendix 1 to this paper. Proposed amendments are shown in tracked changes in Appendix 1 to highlight proposed changes.
19. Appendix 2 to this paper presents a version of the Planning Committee Standing Orders should all proposed amendments be accepted. Appendix 2 is presented for ease of reading the final proposed version of the Planning Committee Standing Orders.

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