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area-based decision making (ABDM) for development control: a review

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This report provides a review of area-based decision-making based on interviews with senior planning officers at authorities with area-based decision-making arrangements. It details issues that need to be resolved in order for authorities to meet the requirements of the new planning agenda. The report also includes a number of guidelines that authorities should follow to ensure that ABDM works well for development control.

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) aims to facilitate self-sustaining change and improvement in the local authority planning sector. PAS helps councils provide faster, fairer, more efficient and better quality services.

PAS is funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and is part of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). Building on the IDeA's work in the local government sector, PAS supports local planning authorities throughout England to develop both their capacity and capability to deliver services and the best possible outcomes for their communities.

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summary

In England, 14 per cent of planning authorities use an area committee model for determining planning applications (this is called area-based decision making or ABDM).

Councils have introduced ABDM in response to a political commitment to devolution of decision making to the most local level. For many of these Council's it remains the cornerstone of their strategy of involving the community in planning issues. This research found that ABDM is considered to be popular with the community and, with some exceptions, is seen to bolster the role of ward members as community representatives. The research was based on interviews with senior planning officers in a selection of authorities that use ABDM to determine planning applications,

There are however serious concerns about the system and some authorities have recentralised the decision making for development control in response to the concerns listed below:

- frequently cited as a reason why it is difficult for authorities to meet their BVPI 109 targets to reduce the time it takes to process planning applications
- associated with inconsistencies in planning decisions and questions about probity in relation to competing pressures on councillors to be both impartial arbiters and community advocates
- more resource intensive than council-wide committees, although it can provide more opportunities for officers to gain committee experience.

Research has found that while there is a higher percentage of ABDM councils who are standards authorities compared with the proportion of ABDM councils overall, there are a number of councils who are able to reconcile ABDM with good performance levels against BVPI 109. This indicates that for ABDM to work effectively, there are issues that need to be addressed by the local authorities using this mechanism. These include:

- frequency of meetings
- democratic structures and delegation
- public participation
- councillor roles in planning
- training
- resources.

This review details a number of guidelines authorities should follow to ensure that ABDM works well for development control:

- reduce the committee cycle times to facilitate applications to be determined within the 8 or 13 week targets
- amalgamate areas, if necessary, to produce agendas of reasonable length to complement increased frequency of meetings

- avoid having all ward members sitting on the area committee in order to allow some members to perform the representative role for local community interests
- ensure that the scheme of delegation means that decisions are made at the appropriate level given the conformity of the proposal to the council's policies
- reduce or eliminate the right of call in or referral upward in order to improve BVPI 109 performance and encourage ownership of and responsibility for the decision made
- reduce the number of committees to reflect the capacity of the officers to adequately support the meetings
- provide regular, robust and compulsory training for councillors sitting on planning committees, including reserve members
- keep the business of determining planning applications separate from other council business in the area committees, preferably at a separate meeting.

section 1: overview of project

introduction

This research was commissioned by the Planning Advisory Service (see Appendix 1) in February 2006 based on initial surveys conducted during 2005. Further data gathering and write-up took place in March 2006.

The purpose of this research was to review the role of an area committee model for determining planning applications in English local authorities (area-based decision making or ABDM). The questions considered by this research included:

- How many councils are using ABDM?
- What are the common experiences of using ABDM? What are the differences?
- How many authorities have reduced or abolished their area-based structures, and why?
- Overall, what procedures and practices most affect development control performance?

what is area-based decision making (ABDM)?

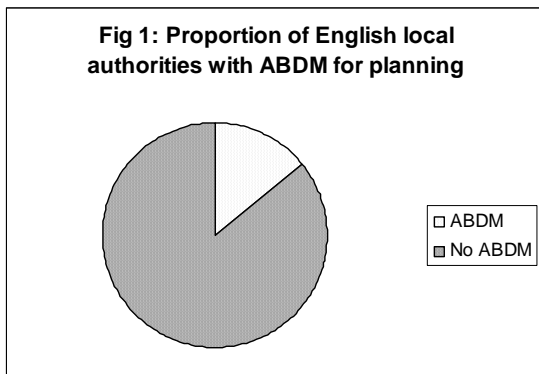
Use of area committees – or ABDM – is designed to bring decision making ‘closer to the people’. In some councils, ABDM is used for a range of council services; some committees decide on planning issues as part of their remit, others do not consider planning at all, still others only deal with planning matters.

Each area committee deals with one district within the council’s geographic jurisdiction. Committee meetings are often held in a community facility within the area itself. Often, all councillors from the area sit, or are eligible to sit, on the committee.

An authority that has area-based committees which make development control decisions are, for the purposes of this research, referred to as an ABDM authority. This includes authorities where the committees may consider other matters in addition to development control, or development control matters only.

Currently, 56 English authorities have ABDM for development control, out of a total of 396 (see Appendix 2 for the full list).¹ As Figure 1 highlights, this is 14% of all authorities.

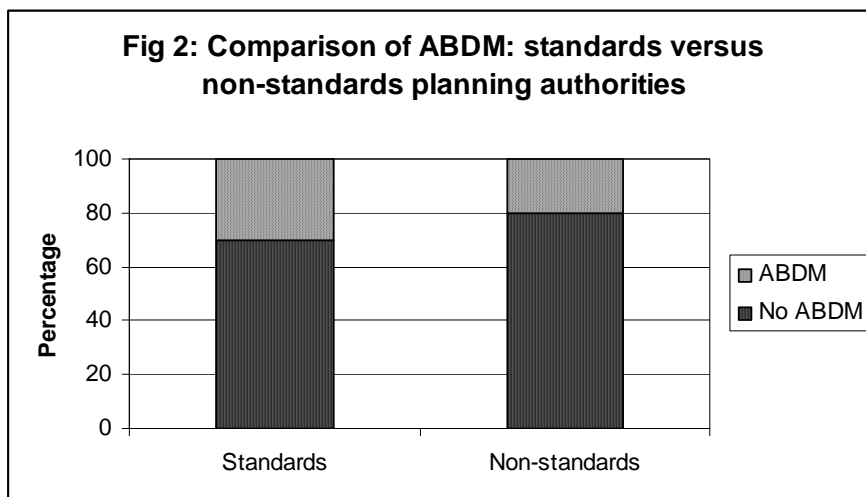
¹ The total number of authorities used for this research is 396. This includes the 388 English local authorities as defined by the LGA and 8 national park planning authorities.



ABDM and planning standards

The ODPM makes the distinction between ‘standards’ and ‘non-standards’ planning authorities to describe performance against BVPI 109 indicators for speed in processing planning applications. Standards authorities are those which have not met the targets, reviewed annually, for major, minor and other applications.²

Figure 2 compares the proportion of ABDM councils by standards and non-standards authorities.³ It shows that 30 per cent of standards authorities have ABDM in place, compared with 20 per cent of non-standards.



² Visit the website www.bvpi.gov.uk/pages/Index.aspH for more information.

³ This is a combined total of standards for major, minor and ‘other’ planning applications 2006/07.

It is tempting to attribute a link between poorer development control performance and ABDM, based on the higher proportion of standards authorities that have ABDM in place. However, in isolation this data is misleading. For example, take the statistics for minor planning applications: 29 per cent of ABDM councils were standards authorities for minor applications in 2005-06, and this proportion *reduced* to 16 per cent in 2006-07 (see Appendix 2).⁴ This is despite ABDM being consistently cited as a *barrier* to achieving better results from minor applications by officers interviewed as part of this project (see Section 2). All authorities, including those with ABDM, have been implementing many initiatives, not least an improvement in delegation, which may account for this improved performance.

Therefore, to simply conduct a quantitative analysis of the performance between local authorities with area-based structures and those without would fail to acknowledge the current context of the planning system. There has been a substantial reform agenda targeted at planning in recent years, leading to significant changes in both policy and procedure. In addition, local authorities introduced their ABDM structures at different times, and in different ways, making direct comparisons difficult.

However, it has been possible, through qualitative interviews with senior officers, to obtain an insight into officer *opinions* about whether ABDM contributes to an improved development control performance (see Section 2). Similarly, their views on the advantages and disadvantages of ABDM provide a useful base from which to offer some findings about the role of ABDM in development control performance, and to identify structures and practices that can make ABDM more effective, or help to mitigate some of the potential disadvantages.

method

The research identified, via a web search, the number of local authorities that have adopted some sort of area-based decision making for development control. This was a total of 56 authorities. This search also identified a further nine authorities that have recentralised their planning decision-making structure in the past three years, although clearly this relied on such a change being identified on the council's website.

A senior planning officer from a sample of 12 of these 65 authorities was interviewed by telephone (see Appendix 3 for a list of the councils) to elicit more in-depth information about why the structure had been adopted/changed, how it worked in practice, benefits and disadvantages, and so on (see Appendix 4 for a list of questions). Officers were also asked to summarise the views of councillors in relation to ABDM. The sample was selected across different geographic areas, sizes of authority and performance.

The remaining 53 authorities were contacted by telephone to confirm that the ABDM information on their website was accurate. They were also asked whether any changes had been, or were being, discussed.

⁴ In the same period, the proportion of non-ABDM councils that were standards authorities for minor applications reduced from 11.5% to 6.5%.

structure of report

The remainder of this report sets out the findings that are structured under the following headings:

ABDM: a time of transition?

Variations in the ABDM model

Advantages and disadvantages of ABDM

Consistency in decision-making

Probity in decision-making

Impact on development control performance

Maximising use of resources.

In light of these findings the paper concludes by considering some of the issues that ABDM authorities need to address and identifies a list of 'Top Tips' for ensuring that ABDM is able to operate effectively for development control.

acknowledgements

The researcher would like to thank the officers who gave their time to be interviewed for this project.

section 2: findings

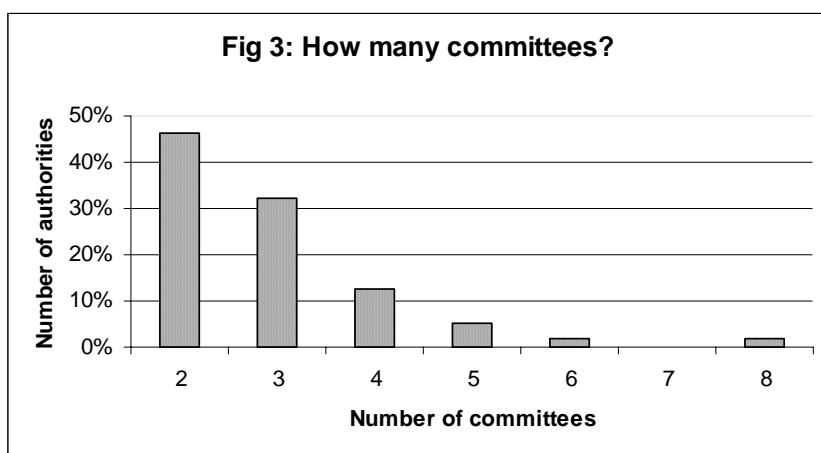
ABDM: a time of transition?

As at March 2006, the research identified that 56 English authorities – out of a total of 396 (or 14%) – have some sort of area-based decision-making structure for development control (see Figure 1).

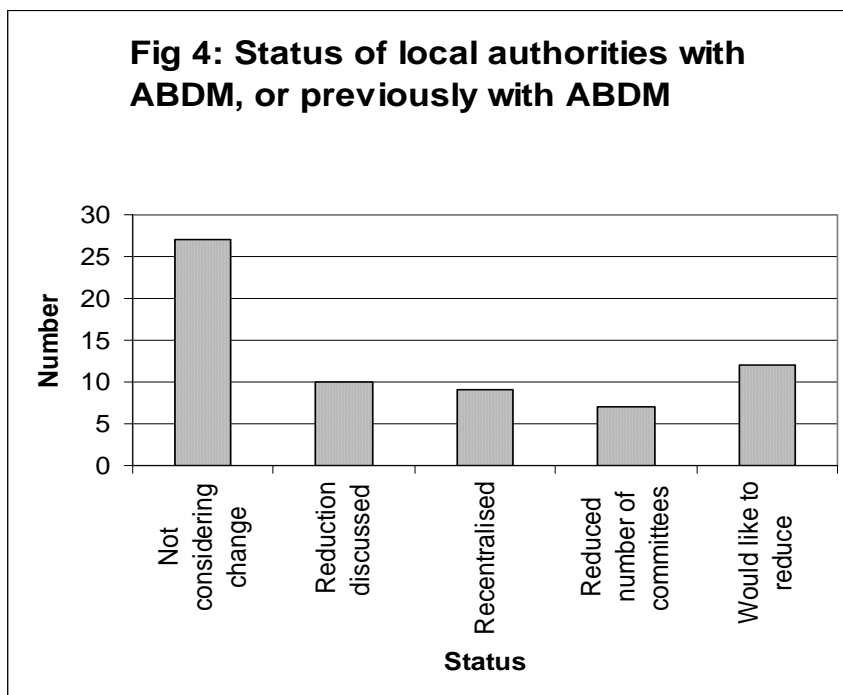
However, this figure is in flux. For example, one council has voted to recentralise from April 2006, while in the same month two more authorities will be voting on, or in ‘serious discussions about’, whether to reduce the number of committees. In the last 12 months another three have either reduced the number of their committees or recentralised.

Related to this, two other councils have recently voted against reducing the number of committees.

Almost half of the councils that operate an area-based system have two area committees (see Figure 3), and three-quarters have either two or three (they may also have an area-wide planning committee).



Of the 56 councils with ABDM, 10 officers reported that there have been recent discussions, or discussions are proposed, about reducing the number of committees. Twelve would like to reduce the number of committees, and another seven have done so in the last three years. Nine reported that they have recentralised at some point in the last three years (see Figure 4).



In all, then, only about half of the authorities with ABDM (27 out of 56) reported that no changes to the current system are being discussed or proposed.

variations in the ABDM model

Area-based decision-making is practised by authorities in a variety of ways, for example:

Area committees that have complete jurisdiction over planning matters in their areas

Area committees that consider all planning matters but refer certain decisions (for example, where the decision of the committee goes against officer advice, or where a decision is a significant departure from planning policy) to a council-wide planning or appeals committee

Area committees that consider matters of local importance, and a council-wide (or 'parent') planning committee which makes decision of strategic significance

A parent planning committee that can call in applications for review after they have already been determined by an area committee.

Each of these models is in use. One of the major concerns about the use of ABDM is the potential for delays in decision making on applications (see below). But some models are more likely to introduce delay than others. For example, in a council where delegation rates are high and area committees have a high degree of autonomy, committees are more likely to own decisions, and the time it takes to make decisions. However, in situations where a council-wide planning committee can call in decisions for review, this may have a detrimental impact on the 'ownership' of decisions made by committees. For example, it may be in the political interest of certain local members to vote in a way that panders to local interests at the expense of the whole area in the knowledge that the parent committee will call in the decision for review. This introduces both additional delay and uncertainty for the developer.

advantages and disadvantages of ABDM

Officers who were interviewed suggested a number of advantages and disadvantages of ABDM. Figure 5 summarises these from the perspective of officers.

Fig 5: advantages and disadvantages of ABDM

advantages

- More control is devolved to local areas that can encourage more participation in local political processes, in this case planning.
- There are better synergies between issues affecting local areas and local communities and the decision-making structure that deals with proposals in these areas.
- ABDM is popular among local people because meetings are held locally.
- Area committees are smaller than council-wide planning committees which gives more of an opportunity for all members to participate in debates.
- ABDM allows for better opportunities for more in-depth debate because members have fewer items to discuss (on the data available area committees consider about two thirds of the number of applications of council-wide committees).
- Area committees can help to spread the development control workload – this means smaller agendas for meetings that make them more manageable.
- Councillors have a more explicit sense of accountability to the local area, and good local knowledge.
- ABDM allows more officers to gain committee experience.
- Close working relationships can develop between officers and councillors – councillors can understand the pressures on officers to improve performance and 'own' their role in helping this through the decisions they take.
- When area committees deal with a range of council business there is an opportunity for increased involvement of community members in a range of corporate objectives.

disadvantages

- Parochialism – members can be swayed by strength of local opinion to over-ride more weighty material considerations, thereby affecting quality and consistency of decision making.
- Some councillors feel constrained in their role of ward representative due to the probity issues involved with sitting on planning committees.
- The quality of local venues can be problematic – too small, and failing to conform with adequate health and safety standards.
- There are different levels of individual knowledge, expertise and interest about planning issues among councillors.
- Area committees sometimes meet less frequently (possibly due to low numbers of agenda items) which makes it more difficult to achieve performance targets.
- There are more meetings to prepare for and more deadlines and administration.
- It is difficult for smaller authorities to ensure the presence of specialist officers (for example, legal or conservation).
- Councillors should be representing the whole council area, not just their ward.
- There may be insufficient experienced officers to staff all committees.
- Relations between officers and councillors at a more local scale can become antagonistic and unproductive.
- With multi-function area committees, there may be a loss of focus for planning issues.

While all these points were cited, there were four issues that were frequently raised as concerns. ABDM was seen to be contributing to:

- a lack of consistent decision making
- problems in dealing with probity in decision making
- difficulties with improving development control performance
- problems with maximising the use of resources.

These are discussed in more detail to follow.

consistency in decision making

Ensuring that development control decisions are taken on planning merit with appropriate weight being given to matters of policy was a key consideration among all officers who were interviewed.

This issue has been underlined in some councils by district audits which have questioned the quality of area committee structures. For example, one council was 'severely criticised' by its district audit for a lack of consistency in decisions between area committees. Another officer complained of 'ludicrously inconsistent decisions' being made between committees.

Officers pointed to the fact that, in most cases, all councillors could sit on an area committee and make planning decisions. However, as one officer highlighted:

'The different levels of individual knowledge, expertise and interest among councillors is staggering, and this contributes to inconsistent decision making.'

Some councils had considered reducing the number of their committees, but voted against doing this. In the view of officers, the reason why councillors had elected to maintain committees was because of the advantages they perceived in relation to devolving decision making locally and, fundamentally, because being involved in planning decisions means that:

'Members feel that they are involved in the sorts of issues for which they stood for office in the first place.'

Those authorities that had recentralised or reduced the number of their committees reported higher levels of satisfaction with the revised arrangements. One interviewee from an authority with a reduced number of committees described the original structure as 'an unmitigated disaster' with too many councillors of limited planning competence involved in decision making; the revised arrangement is working 'excellently' with the council feeling it has sufficient resources to train the reduced number of councillors involved in decision making.

probity in decision making

Councillors do not only sit on an area committee. Typically, they wear many other hats in the local area – at the very least, they are elected to represent the interests of their ward. But sometimes this advocacy role may clash with the need to remain impartial in relation to planning matters. In these situations councillors are required to declare any interest they may have and should consider withdrawing from the committee. This sometimes makes it hard to find enough members to make area committees quorate.

Interviewees raised concerns about problems in decision making in authorities using ABDM. One officer remarked that:

'ABDM is fraught with difficulties ... it places councillors in a position where it is difficult to resist making populist decisions rather than ones based on planning merit.'

As highlighted above, in many councils with ABDM all councillors sit on a committee and are therefore directly involved in the planning decision-making process. In most cases a move to a single committee, or a reduced number, would lead to a reduction in the number of councillors who can participate directly through a committee. This was therefore considered to be an erosion of both community and councillor involvement in the decision-making process for planning. However, given the feeling of some councillors that there is a difficulty in resolving their role as local representative and that of planning decision maker, there is much merit in not having all the members of an area sitting on the area planning committee. This allows for some members to take a community advocacy role while others take the decision-making role.

Two of the councils who have recently recentralised their area committees have attempted to resolve the concerns of councillors about a lack of involvement by having a single area-wide planning committee with two sets of members who alternate for each meeting (an 'A' and 'B' committee). This has resulted in a similar number of planning committee places being available compared with the previous area committee system, but introduces the potential for delay in relation to applications which are deferred to the next committee meeting because of, for example, requests for additional information.

impact on development control performance

One officer who was interviewed felt that:

'There is no reason why an area-based system should be of detriment to overall development control productivity or performance.'

However, all of the others interviewed felt that, in practice, ABDM did not fit with a service which was aspiring to meet ever more challenging targets in terms of the time it takes to process applications (it should be stressed again that these interviews were with officers). Comments included:

'Abolishing ABDM has undoubtedly improved performance.'
'ABDM does not improve development performance.'
'Since recentralising there has been a huge improvement in performance.'
'It is virtually impossible to maintain a quality-based development control regime with area committees.'

In addition to the 12 authorities which were interviewed in more detail, the other councils discussing a reduction in the number of committees were asked why this was being considered. The most common response was that it was an attempt to improve performance.

In relation to performance, the most frequently cited complaint was the infrequency of area committee meetings. This means that BVPI 109 targets (especially for minor applications) in some authorities were very difficult to meet depending on when an application was received in the committee cycle. This is particularly the case where along with the area committees, a parent committee has a right to review or call-in the decisions of the area committee.

One interviewee's description of the dilemma was typical:

'With area committees meeting every 5/6 weeks, if an application comes in at the wrong part of the cycle it will be almost impossible to get it approved within the

eight week target. Committee agendas are smaller but the infrequency of meetings simply blows the figures – to get to the next notch of performance something needs to change as delegation is already high.'

There are well-performing authorities that have maintained their ABDM processes (70% of ABDM councils are non-standards authorities). But no officer felt that ABDM had been a factor which had actually contributed to this success.

None of the officers in authorities that had recentralised felt that it had led to reduced performance. On the contrary, one reported 'a huge improvement in performance' while another felt that their performance had gone 'from one extreme to another' to a point where it was now a high performing authority.

maximising use of resources

All but one of the officers highlighted the resource and administrative implications of ABDM, even in authorities where no reduction was being considered and ABDM was reported as working well. An officer working in one of these authorities emphasised that it had been important to spell out to councillors the increased administrative and professional burden of ABDM, in order to argue effectively for the necessary extra resources. As he put it:

'We need the resources to do the job properly: if I have a thimble and the guy beside me has a shovel and we are asked to dig a hole, who will be quicker and more effective?'

Another reported that the 'sheer number of meetings' caused by ABDM created 'formidable administrative problems', while another felt that officers had been 'performing miracles' to ensure that the various committee deadlines were being met. A further factor is the difficulty that smaller districts have in providing the area committees with the support of specialist officers. It is often difficult for area committees to reach quality decisions without input from legal officers or from specialists such as historic buildings or transport officers.

ABDM was described as 'resource hungry', creating replication and failing to achieve economies of scale. The general view was summed up by this comment:

'Servicing ABDM is financially and administratively difficult.'

Despite the resource concerns, one interviewee was uneasy about the potential loss of local involvement through recentralising. The local presence was felt to be an important part of the quality of the service, even if it did not contribute to achieving economies of scale. In this example the public valued having a local committee because it felt geographically remote from the main town in the district. While it might save resources to merge the committees (and the supporting area planning team which was also based in the local area), there was strong support from the community for maintaining the local planning presence.

section 3: issues to consider

As the commentary above suggests, officers do not believe that ABDM contributes positively to achieving a high performing authority in terms of meeting BVPI 109 targets. It can be associated with inconsistent decision making (although with member training this is not universal) and problems with probity, and can be a drain on resources.

However, eight of the interviewees also stated that ABDM is popular with the public and/or councillors and decision making at the community level is seen as providing a high quality service. It is also clear that a number of authorities are committed to continuing to use an ABDM structure to make planning decisions.

One officer summed up the dilemma faced by councils with ABDM:

'ABDM brings the council closer to the local communities but there is a tension with propriety issues and maintaining or increasing the speed of the planning system.'

With this in mind, what are the key issues that need to be considered when thinking about how ABDM can be a part of an authority that continues to improve its planning performance?

The research suggests that for ABDM to be an effective part of an improving planning authority there are a number of factors which need to be addressed:

- frequency of meetings
- democratic structures and delegation
- public participation
- councillor involvement in planning
- training
- resources.

These are discussed briefly below.

frequency of meetings

The lack of frequency of committee meetings with ABDM can make it almost physically impossible to increase the speed with which applications are processed, and therefore to improve performance. Whatever committee system is in place, committees need to meet frequently enough so that the cycle of meetings is not a stumbling block to improving performance through an inability to meet BVPI 109 targets, especially for minor applications.

democratic structures and delegation

In ABDM it is important that decisions are taken at the correct level for both responsible and consistent decision making, in line with stated policies, and to ensure that an authority meets its BVPI targets. There is often a tension between the desire for increased local participation in planning and a recognition that local considerations will weigh more heavily in considering the merits of planning proposals. This leads some authorities to have a call-in procedure where a council-wide (or 'parent') planning committee reviews the decisions of local committees.

This can lead to both a lack of ownership and, potentially, politically motivated decision making by the area committee where it makes a 'popular' decision rather than one based on planning merit, knowing that the decision will be reviewed and ultimately taken at a higher level. This also leads to further delay and uncertainty in the system for developers.

Parent or council-wide committees should be retained for determining truly strategic proposals which will have a material impact beyond the local area.

public participation

Local involvement is cited as one of the primary rationales for ABDM. However, the research discovered that in some places councils are opting to hold area committees at a central location because of the lack of suitable facilities in a local area (for example, no access for disabled people). This highlights that participation may not necessarily be reliant on location, but needs good processes and accessible facilities to ensure that a range of views are heard. Officers pointed to a number of initiatives that they had taken to ensure that participation was incorporated into area and council-wide committee meetings, for example including speaking at meetings.

One council that had recentralised its planning decision making reported that the biggest concern about doing so 'was a loss of local input'. But in this particular council, area committees have been retained for other purposes which means that:

'Any major application can still be taken to local committees for consultation and informal input. This process helps to ensure that the planning board can make well-informed planning decisions.'

councillor involvement in planning

The other popular reason for ABDM is that councillors are able to represent local concerns in a local setting. In many cases it also enables all councillors to sit on a planning decision-making committee.

However, officers reported that there is increasing concern, sometimes prompted by district audits, about the dual role of councillors as both champions of a local area and impartial decision makers making judgements based on planning merit. As a precaution, councils have codes of practice to ensure that councillors do not participate in decisions in which they may have an interest. However, some officers reported that councillors are feeling constrained in their ability to advocate for their area because of the restrictions placed on them as planning councillors. As one officer put it:

'They are perceived as failing to be champions of their ward and this plays badly. The area committee system accentuates this dilemma.'

In future, councillors may increasingly prefer a system where they are not compelled to sit on a local area planning committee, so that they can express their views about local development and represent their local community. In one authority that is about to recentralise, the officer thinks that councillors will feel:

'Freed up to make representations to the planning committee ... rather than feeling curtailed by the current system because of the restrictions on them being able to make their views known.'

It may be that the high proportion of councils that now have two area committees is a sign that many councils are coming to some sort of compromise between full-blown area committees and a single planning committee. Having two committees retains a commitment to a local area focus but can also free up some councillors from planning committee duties. It is less cumbersome administratively and committees can meet more often.

training

Officers reported a wide variation in councillors' appreciation of planning matters. While all authorities involved their councillors in training to sit on planning committees, this adds to the financial burden when all councillors are involved. Balancing participation with expertise was a concern for a number of officers, and was raised by all those who were in an authority that had recentralised.

Part of the attraction for officers of fewer members being a part of formal planning committees is that they can liaise with:

'A pool of councillors who have planning expertise rather than the current system where all councillors, no matter what their planning expertise and interest, can vote on local planning matters.'

resources

Councils need to recognise that ABDM is more resource intensive than a single committee for development control. For ABDM to work effectively the planning service needs to be equipped to provide:

- experienced senior officers to attend the committees
- support staff to ensure the preparation and distribution of agenda papers without undue lead-in times that are a barrier to achieving BVPI 109 performance targets
- specialist advisors to guide consideration of issues such as transport, highways, conservation and legal implications.

Venues should be accessible and fit for the purpose of public meetings.

section 4: recommendations and conclusion

top tips for effective working of ABDM in development control

This research has explored the use of ABDM in development control decision-making. Based on the findings, Figure 6 sets out a list of 'top tips' to ensure that ABDM can be used effectively for development control.

Fig 6: top tips to ensure effective working of ABDM for development control

1. Reduce the committee cycle times to facilitate applications to be determined within the 8 or 13 week targets
2. Amalgamate areas, if necessary, to produce agendas of reasonable length to complement increased frequency of meetings
3. Avoid having all ward members sitting on the area committee in order to allow some members to perform the representative role for local community interests
4. Ensure that the scheme of delegation means that decisions are made at the appropriate level given the conformity of the proposal to the council's policies
5. Reduce or eliminate the right of call in or referral upward in order to improve BVPI 109 performance and encourage greater ownership of and responsibility for the decision made
6. Reduce the number of committees to reflect the capacity of the officers to adequately support the meetings
7. Provide regular, robust and compulsory training for councillors sitting on planning committees, including reserve members
8. Keep the business of determining planning applications separate from other council business in the area committees, preferably at a separate meeting

conclusion

ABDM was introduced by some local authorities to devolve decision making out of town halls so that local communities could participate more easily, and so that councillors could have a stronger presence in their local areas.

ABDM is used by around 14 per cent of councils in England. About half of these are currently discussing whether to reduce the number or abolish area committees for planning decisions; the remainder are committed to maintaining their ABDM structure.

This research found that where ABDM is still implemented it has retained its popularity with councillors and local communities (in the opinion of senior planning officers). Officers also pointed to other advantages of ABDM, such as smaller agendas, and the opportunity for more junior staff to gain committee experience.

However, in recent years the planning system has undergone significant reforms. Officers reported that the government's vision of an efficient and user-friendly service, which comes to 'robust decisions within sensible timeframes'⁵, is more difficult to achieve in authorities with ABDM. Most notably, ABDM was consistently cited as being a barrier to improving speed and performance, and demonstrating consistency in decision making across whole council areas.

Where ABDM is considered to work well the democratic structures and resources invested in it are appropriate to deal with the potential pitfalls of the system.

further reading

LGA (2002) *Probity in planning*, LGA: London

LGA (2005) *Member engagement in planning matters*, LGA: London

PAS (2005) *Positive engagement: a guide for planning councillors*, PAS: London

⁵ See the 2001 green paper '*Planning: delivering a fundamental change*' (DTLR)

appendix 1

about the Planning Advisory Service (PAS)

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) gives planners help in providing faster, fairer, more efficient and better quality services. With funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), PAS supports local planning authorities across England in improving their performance and moving towards excellence. PAS aims:

- to support all local planning authorities in continuous improvement with adoption of good practice in both plan-making and development control
- to provide tailored services to assist under-performing authorities in the development and implementation of improvement plans
- to promote a culture of change, learning and improvement among local planning authorities
- to offer direct support to individual authorities to deliver key Government objectives such as large scale housing developments and regeneration projects

A range of support is available to authorities including best practice case studies, workshops, peer review, member leadership academy and detailed guidance and advice to authorities around improvement. For more information visit www.pas.gov.uk

appendix 2

ABDM councils and planning standards (05-06 & 06-07)

ABDM council	Standards 05-06			Standards 06-07		
	Majors 05-06	Minors 05-06	Other 05-06	Majors 06-07	Minors 06-07	Other 06-07
London Borough of Barnet						
Bath and NE Somerset Council	yes					
City of Bradford	yes			yes		
Braintree District Council					yes	
Bristol City Council						
Caradon District Council					yes	
Charnwood Borough Council						
Cherwell District Council				yes		
Chichester District Council						
East Hampshire District Council						
East Riding of Yorkshire Council						
Eastleigh Borough Council		yes				
Elmbridge Borough Council						
Epping Forest District Council				yes	yes	
London Borough of Greenwich				yes		
Herefordshire Council				yes	yes	yes
London Borough of Hillingdon		yes	yes			
Horsham District Council						
London Borough of Hounslow						
London Borough of Islington						
Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council	yes					
Leeds City Council						
Maldon District Council	yes	yes				
Malvern Hills District Council				yes		
Mid Suffolk District Council	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mid Sussex District Council						
North Hertfordshire District Council		yes	yes			
North Kesteven District Council						
North Norfolk District Council						
North Somerset Council						
Oxford City Council	yes					
Pendle Borough Council						
London Borough of Redbridge			yes			
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council						
Salisbury District Council		yes				
Scarborough Borough Council	yes			yes		
Sheffield City Council						

ABDM council	Standards 05-06			Standards 06-07		
	Majors 05-06	Minors 05-06	Other 05-06	Majors 06-07	Minors 06-07	Other 06-07
South Gloucestershire Council	yes			yes	yes	
South Norfolk District Council						
South Somerset District Council	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
London Borough of Southwark						
St Albans City and District Council		yes				
Stratford-on-Avon District Council						
Suffolk Coastal District Council	yes	yes			yes	
Sunderland City Council		yes	yes	yes		
London Borough of Sutton	yes					
Test Valley Borough Council	yes	yes		yes		
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council						
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council						
Waveney Borough Council		yes				
Wealden District Council	yes	yes			yes	
West Berkshire Council						
West Dorset District Council		yes	yes			
West Oxfordshire District Council						
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	yes	yes	yes			
City of York	yes	yes		yes		
Totals	15	16	8	13	9	3

appendix 3

list of authorities that were interviewed

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

Eastleigh Borough Council

Herefordshire County Council

Mendip District Council

North Hertfordshire District Council

London Borough of Redbridge

Salisbury District Council

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Sunderland City Council

London Borough of Sutton

Walsall Council

West Wiltshire District Council

appendix 4

list of questions for interviewees

about your authority

1. Are you currently a standards or non-standards authority?
2. Do you have an area-based decision-making structure for development control?
3. If yes, what is the structure (ie how many committees etc)?
4. When did you adopt this structure?
5. Why did you adopt it?
6. Are you considering recentralising? If so, why?

ABDM: advantages and disadvantages

7. In your view, what are the main advantages of ABDM?
8. What are the main disadvantages?
9. How do you maintain good development control performance with area-based decision making?
10. [If change is recent] What differences have you noticed between ABDM and a centralised structure?
11. In your view, does ABDM lead to an improved development control performance? Why/why not?
12. In general, what are the views of officers about ABDM?
13. In general, what are the views of councillors about ABDM?

ABDM: other issues

14. In general, what do think are the main procedures and practices which most affect development control performance eg 'call in', member-officer relations?



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