

Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



Constitutional Affairs Scrutiny Standing Panel Monday, 27th March, 2006

Place: Committee Room 2, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Time: 7.30 pm

Democratic Services Officer: Z Folley - Research and Democratic Services
Tel: 01992 564532 Email: zfolley@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors R Morgan (Chairman), Mrs P Brooks (Vice-Chairman), D Bateman, R D'Souza, Mrs J Davis, J Demetriou, Mrs A Haigh, J Markham, Mrs P Richardson and D Stallan

<p>PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND</p>
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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 20 FEBRUARY 2006 (Pages 5 - 10)

Attached.

3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

(Head of Research and Democratic Services) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

4. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the

Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 11 - 12)

(Chairman/Lead Officer) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed the Terms of Reference of this Panel and associated Work Programme. This is attached. The Panel are asked at each meeting to review both documents.

The OSC is about to formulate next years OS work plan incorporating a programme for this Panel. In view of this, the Panel may wish to bring forward suggestions/ideas on topics for inclusion in its work programme for next year.

6. FUTURE ROLE OF COUNCIL (Pages 13 - 32)

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). To consider the attached report.

7. REVIEW OF AREA PLANS SUB - COMMITTEES (Pages 33 - 38)

Recommendation:

To consider the attached summary of case information in respect of the four Area Planning Committees

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). This information was requested at the last meeting on 20 February 2006. A copy of the earlier report to the former Policy Working Group 3 is also attached for information.

8. COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS - REVIEW OF SUPPORT

Head of Research and Democratic Services to report.

9. ELECTORAL PILOTS/ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION BILL - UPDATE

Head of Research and Democratic Services to report.

10. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next programmed meeting of the Panel will be held on 6 June 2006 at 7.30 in Committee Room 1 and then on:

7 August 2006
10 October 2006
04 December 2006
8 February 2007
2 April 2007

11. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

To consider which reports are ready to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

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**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2006
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 10.01 PM**

Members Present:	R Morgan (Chairman), Mrs P Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A Haigh, J Markham, Mrs P Richardson and D Stallan
Other members present:	Mrs D Borton, M Colling, Mrs D Collins, P Gode, Mrs A Grigg, B Sandler, Mrs M Sartin and Mrs J H Whitehouse
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs J Davis
Officers Present	I Willett (Head of Research and Democratic Services), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer), P Seager (Chairmans Secretary) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)
Also in attendance:	(none)

21. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

No substitute Members were reported for the meeting.

22. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations were made pursuant to the Member Code of Conduct.

23. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 5 JANUARY 2006

Noted.

24. CIVIC PROTOCOL

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that the Loughton Town Council had proposed changes to the Local Protocol for the Order of Precedence at events in Loughton. Under this proposal, the Town Council Chairman might officiate rather than the Chairman of this Council if events were deemed "local" rather than "District" events. The Panel had before them correspondence between the District Council and the Town Council itself.

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported the history of this request and the operational and support difficulties that might arise from the proposals. The Panel considered the difficulties in trying to differentiate between 'purely local' and District wide events as envisaged under the request. The Panel noted the views of the Chairman of the Council and his secretary. The Panel resolved that no changes should be made to the current protocol.

ACTION:

The Head of Research and Democratic Services to send a letter to Loughton Town Council informing of the decision.

25. ELECTORAL CANDIDATES PACK

The Senior Democratic Services Officers presented the information pack for candidates in elections in Epping Forest. The intention was to issue the information early on in the electoral process to give candidates a greater understanding of the role following their successful election. The Panel considered each section incorporating information on IT and training needs and made a number of changes.

It was proposed that:

- (a) A brief introduction/abstract be added to inform on the purpose of the pack and overview the sections and be followed by the contents table;
- (b) Section 4 on History should include more information on the local villages and appear early on in the sections followed by Section 6 then 3;
- (c) Section 2 should be moved to the end of the document;
- (d) Word 'Tories' taken out from pg 50;
- (e) Information be added on the duties candidates might be asked to undertake immediately after their successful election. For instance in terms of paperwork requirements;
- (f) First line of Paragraph on Cabinet structure on pg 50 be reworded to say that 'The Council has a 'Cabinet' which is a group of nine Councillors from the political groups;
- (g) Wording in Section three on pgs 40-41 be re written to state that new Members would be invited to undertake the actions reported. Part on Councillor 'Buddies' be amended to state 'does your group run this scheme?';
- (h) Wording in Section 8 on Code of Conduct and other Ethical Issues be reworded in parts to ensure that it realistically reflected the expectations of the code and the consequences for Members;
- (i) Section 10 on Member Connectivity Scheme state in bold type that help would be given to Members who are not very confident with IT facilities;
- (j) Consideration be given to reducing the length of the appendices that include information reported elsewhere in the main document;
- (k) Pack should have a bright cover and be split into two sections covering pre-election information and post election guidance;
- (l) Feed back to sought from the recipients of the pack to ascertain their views;

The Panel thanked the Senior Democratic Services Officer Simon Hill for producing and putting the document together.

ACTION:

The Senior Democratic Services Officer to amend document as indicated.

26. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

27. REVIEW OF AREA PLANS SUB - COMMITTEES

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that Councillor Mrs D Collins had raised concerns on behalf of Area Plans 'C' about the low levels of business being allocated to the Committee and its relatively small Membership size. This had resulted in problems in ensuring a quorum for meetings. He drew attention to a report proposing a review of the structure of the Area Plans Sub – Committees which was submitted to Policy Working Group 3 in September 2004.

It was proposed that all Members should be allocated a place on the planning sub-committees enabling the Membership size of each panel to be 'levelled up' to about the same. The following alternative models aimed at addressing these issues were proposed:

Option 1

Area Plans 'A' - Loughton only – with a Membership size of 14 drawn from all wards in the area;

Area Plans 'B' - the existing areas under the Committee (minus the two North Weald Wards) plus Chigwell – Membership size 15;

Area Plans 'C' - existing areas plus the rural villages (Nazeing, Roydon, Broadley Common) and North Weald – Membership size 14;

Area Plan 'D' - existing areas minus the rural villages plus Buckhurst Hill- Membership size 15

Option 2

Area Plans 'A' - Loughton and Buckhurst Hill – with a Membership size of 19 drawn from all wards in the area;

Area Plans 'B' - the existing area under the Committee (minus the two North Weald Wards) plus Chigwell – Membership size 15;

Area Plans 'C' - existing areas plus the rural villages (Nazeing, Roydon, Broadley Common) and North Weald – Membership size 14;

Area Plan 'D' - Waltham Abbey only.

It was agreed that statistics be obtained on the number of Planning applications submitted to each sub-committee over the last council year to inform the discussion. It was suggested that this be taken in account when looking at alternative models and that the investigation should not be restricted to exploring the two options reported at the meeting but look at other proposals such as grouping areas geographically.

ACTION

Head of Research and Democratic Services to produce report for next meetings incorporated the merits of the options reported and the numbers of planning cases submitted to each sub-committee meeting over the last council year.

28. FUTURE ROLE OF COUNCIL

The Policy and Research Officer reported that, during recent meetings, the Panel had explored various alternative practices for enhancing debate at council meetings. The Panel had asked officers to work up some of the practices identified to reach a decision on whether or not to support them. A report that fully explored the issues was before Members. Comments received from a number of Councils mentioned in the report on the operation of some of their procedures was also reported for information.

Members supported the following practices:

- State of the District Debates.
- Single Issue Council meetings,
- Council in Committee/ Seminar
- Reports from the Leader and Cabinet Members
- Reports from Overview and Scrutiny
- Questions by Members
- Questions by the Public

It was emphasised that the above should be subject to pre specified time limits. It was proposed that a deadline be put in place for the receipt of public questions. It was noted that in the event that this was missed, a written reply could be offered to the initiator or alternately the question could be carried over to the next available meeting. In relation to questions, it was recommended that the rules for supplementary questions be relaxed so that they could be submitted on an open basis rather than for elucidation only. The revisions should permit questions without notice.

Members agreed that no changes be proposed to the slot at Council meetings for the Chairman's announcements and the presentation of awards.

ACTION

The Policy and Research Officer to draft a revised set of procedures for the next meeting.

29. PROGRESS REPORT ON ELECTORAL PILOTS AND ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION BILL

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reminded the Panel that the Councils application for an electoral pilot for this years District elections had been endorsed by Ministers and would be submitted to the Council this month for consideration. He also reported more general changes introduced through the Electoral Administration Bill to come into effect in May 2006. Should the bill be approved, the hours of polling at local elections would be extended to cover those in operation for Parliamentary elections (i.e 7a.m to 10p.m). It would also change the

deadline for the submission of postal votes to 11 days. The deadline of 6 days for proxy votes would stay the same. Other changes would allow emergency proxy votes to be submitted on the day of the election and ensure that confirmation was sent out to postal voters on receipt of their completed papers. New arrangements would also be introduced to deal with spoilt ballots together with changes to the electoral register.

A further bill was also being formulated for implementation in May 2007. This was likely to lead to the formulation of a national electoral register by linking up existing area ones, allocate the duty to secure the highest level of return to Returning Officers lower the minimum for electoral candidates to 18, introduce a new code of conduct for postal voting, debar politicians from having a role in the postal vote process, and issues new guidance on how independent candidates should describe themselves on the ballot paper.

30. HOUSING APPEALS PANEL - TITLE, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PROCEDURE

The Head of Research and Democratic Services presented the report.

The reported was supported for consideration by the OSC on 16 March 2006.

31. COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS - REVIEW OF SUPPORT

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that Group Leaders had recently discussed the position of Councillors who might be the subject of complaints to the local Standards Committee. At present, officers involved in such complaints must be careful in offering advise to avoid allegations of any conflicts of interest. Some Group Leaders were of the view that this isolation could leave Councillors subject to complaints without any ready access to guidance from within the Council. They also acknowledged that the Council itself should not be seem to be allocating funding to this area.

Four options had been raised for consideration.

- (a) Provision within the political groups of funds to provide advise support where requested
- (b) An arrangement where members set aside a percentage of their basic allowance to create a fund.
- (c) The political parties concerned make such a provision
- (d) A mentor system where a member would be trained to offer advise.

The Panel considered whether some form of insurance should be set up to provide professional advise on serious cases. Other more day to day cases could be dealt with by other means. It was suggested that reciprocal arrangements could be established with an authority elsewhere. This might enable Members to access advise from officers of the partner authority involved ensuring it was provided by an external source rather than the officers directly involved in an investigation. Such an agreement would necessitate the Council offering a similar service to the participating Council. . A mentor system could also be established. The Head of Research and Democratic Services undertook to look into these options

ACTION:

The Head of Research and Democratic Services to draft a report for consideration at the next meeting.

32. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Housing Appeals Panel – Title Terms of Reference and Procedure

33. FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted that the next meeting would be held at 7.30 p.m on 27 March 2006 in Committee Room 1.

Constitutional Affairs - Terms Of Reference and Work Programme 2005/6

(a) Terms of Reference

1. To undertake reviews of constitutional, civic, electoral and governance matters and services for members on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. To report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Council and the Cabinet with recommendations on matters allocated to the Panel as appropriate.

(b) Work programme

Item	Status	Deadline
1. Council Meetings – Completion of Review of Questions and Motions.	Completed	Council Meeting on 27 September 2005
2. Protocol for Relationships with external organisations and partnerships	Completed	Council meeting on 13 December 2005
3. Contract Standing Orders - Review	Completed	Council Meeting on 13 December 2005
4. Review of Elections 2005	Completed	September 2005
5. Response to Periodic electoral reviews	Completed	November 2005
6. Member Services – Draft Guidance from Standards Committee	Completed	Referred to Standards Committee for further consideration and submission to Council meeting on 24 April 2006
7. Council Meetings – Completion of Review of Future Role.	Ongoing	April 2006
8. Housing Appeals Panel - Title, Terms of Reference and Procedure	Completed	
9. Complaints Against Councillors – Review of Support	Ongoing	To be agreed
10. Civic Protocol	Completed	
11. Review of pack for candidates standing at District Council elections in 2006	Completed	
12. Review of Opportunities for Participation in further Electoral Pilots.	Ongoing	By May 2006 (subject to ODPM timetable)

13. Review of Changes in the legal requirements concerning postal voting and resource implications.	Ditto	Ditto
14. Review of Changes in procedures for electoral registration.	Ditto	Ditto
15. Completion of Review of Parliamentary Constituencies.	Ditto	Ditto (possible reserve list item)
16. Review of Area Planning Sub – Committees	Ongoing	To be agreed

Report to Constitutional Affairs Scrutiny Standing Panel

Date of Meeting: 27 March 2006

Subject: Council Meetings – Review of Future Role

Officer contact for further information: C Overend (4247)

Committee Secretary: Z Folley (4532)



Recommendation:

That, having considered in more detail the agreed enhancements to the Council procedures (items (a) – (g) below), Members of the Panel determine the arrangements for the implementation of those enhancements.

Report:

1. (Head of Research and Democratic Services) At its meeting on 20 February 2006 the Panel, having concluded its review of potential enhancements to the role of Council meetings, agreed a number of preferred options, as set out below. The Panel agreed that the Council's Terms of Reference should be amended to reflect these enhancements, with Officers to report back to this meeting in more detail on how they might be implemented:

- (a) 'State of the District' debates – an annual event to review successes and problems for the district.
- (b) 'Single Issue' Council meetings – meetings called for a specific purpose linked to Community or Council concerns
- (c) 'Council in Committee' /seminar concept
- (d) Reports from Overview and Scrutiny
- (e) Reports from the Leader and Cabinet Members
- (f) Questions by Members
- (g) Questions by the public

2. Further information on the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference and how the detailed arrangements might be implemented, is set out below:

'State of the District' Debate

3. Members were keen to introduce the concept of the 'State of the District' debate, having been impressed by the successful introduction of this item at other local authorities such as Arun, Ashfield, Breckland, Fenland, Rother, Salisbury and Welwyn Hatfield. Members stressed the need for these debates to result in positive outcomes, for the meetings to be held once a year and to be linked in to the Best Value/Council Plan and budgetary processes.

4. In that regard it is suggested that the current arrangements in place at the aforementioned Welwyn Hatfield Council provide a good role model on which our own arrangements could be based, subject to their adaption to meet local needs. Details of the Welwyn Hatfield arrangements are attached at Appendix 1. There are a number of key decisions to be addressed such as the timing of the debate (it is suggested that it be held annually in the Autumn, commencing in 2006, to fit in with the Council and BV Planning and budgetary processes); whether the debate should be held at a separate single meeting or as part of an ordinary scheduled Council meeting; and the idea of public questions being incorporated into the process. Once a decision has been made on these issues, the organisational aspects can be looked at in more depth by officers and reported back in due course.

5. At this stage it would be sufficient to amend the Terms of Reference to include an additional item to the effect that the 'Council will hold an annual State of the District Council debate', with addition of a protocol in the Constitution in due course developed in the light of practice and experience.

Single – Issue Council Meetings

6. Having looked at examples at other local authorities where single-issue Council meetings had been held, Members felt that this facility could be usefully applied at Epping Forest District Council.

7. Local authorities, which have held single – issue Council meetings to debate major policy issues, have included Braintree, Carrick, Daventry, Thanet and Kirklees. Some of the local authorities which have adopted this approach, have sometimes also involved representatives from a range of agencies, organisations and partnership bodies so that the Council meeting resembles more of a public forum than a formal decision-making body. Others such as Harrogate have held informal single-issue sessions before the full Council has started, as a way of avoiding complications with standing orders Members have identified. Recent issues where this approach could have been used in this district include the introduction of 'wheelie bins' or development proposals in the area.

8. Further information is being sought from the local authorities concerned on how the single-issue Council meeting has been provided for within Council Constitutions, including any changes required to the Council's Terms of Reference and the 'trigger-mechanism' required, ie who determines when a single-issue meeting is required and on what basis? There will be a report back at the meeting on the responses received.

'Council in Committee' and 'Council in Seminar'

9. The Panel has expressed the view that the enhancements might be achievable through the adoption of the 'Council in Committee' and/or 'Council in Seminar' procedures similar to those sought from members on the precise format they envisage the Council's Committee and Council Seminar might take. The suggestion was that there should be provision for all members to meet together but without all the rules of formal Council procedures applying. This would allow discussion on items before they are formally determined at Council. And pre-decision debates on key issues.

10. However, clarification is sought from Members on the precise format they envisage the 'Council in Committee' and 'Council in Seminar' might take. For instance the 'Council in Committee' as applied at Wakefield Council has involved the convening of special Council meetings outside the regular standing order procedures, as a way of discussing major issues and involving the public and partner organisations in the debate. The procedure for single-issue sessions at Harrogate referred to in Paragraph 7 above is not dissimilar to the application of the 'Council in Committee' model operated by Wakefield.

11. In Barnsley the constitution provides for a forum that promotes the flow of information and debate between the executive and non-executive councillors. This is the 'council meeting in seminar'. Its purpose is:

'To exercise the functions of the Council in ensuring that meaningful debate and a hearing has taken place as part of an inclusive process towards development on such issues that are part of the Councils policy framework'.

The 'council in seminar' meets once a month and is open to the public. Each meeting is dedicated exclusively to one topic, decided by non-executive Councillors requests. Meetings also include provision for participation by co-opted members of scrutiny commissions, who also find it useful to be briefed on wider issues.

The 'council in seminar' was developed in response to non-executive councillors' complaints that they felt out of touch in the new constitution. Councillors now have the opportunity to discuss topics of interest and receive replies to their questions. Its main value is to enable Councillors to be briefed on issues and to keep abreast of wider developments.

12. Do members at EFDC have something akin to the Barnsley concept in mind when they refer to the 'Council in Seminar'?

Reports from Overview and Scrutiny and Reports from the Leader and Cabinet Members

13. Members have also agreed that there should be provision at each Council meeting for the consideration of reports, from not only the Leader of Council, but also the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny and individual Cabinet members/Portfolio Holders. Many local authorities already provide for the consideration of such reports at Council meetings with a view to updating Members on significant issues within each of these areas on an ongoing basis and providing the opportunity for them to ask specific questions.

14. Extracts from the relevant sections of the Constitution and a recent Agenda for one of those local authorities, Wakefield Council, are attached as Appendix 2 (and 3). It is suggested that the procedure at Wakefield, including questions submitted in writing and non-written supplemental questions, could be adapted to suit our own requirements.

15. Members were of the opinion that a time limit should be set for consideration of the reports and questions arising thereon and that the amount of time set aside for each should be similar. The Panel is now asked to determine what that time limit should be. For example it would be possible to set a limit of 20 minutes for each of the reports from

the Leader's and the Overview and Scrutiny Chairman and 20 minutes in total to cover all the Portfolio Holder Reports.

Questions by Members

16. At the meeting on 20 February 2006 Members of the Panel also expressed the view that there should be provision within the Council's Terms of Reference for 'questions without notice' on any topic which impacts on the role of the Council. Where such provision already exists within the constitution of other local authority, the wording within the appropriate article of the Constitution is on the lines of that set out below. It is suggested that the Terms of reference for own Council meetings could be amended to incorporate a similar provision. Again Members may wish to consider whether a time limit should be applicable in these circumstances, should this be part of the overall time limit referred to in paragraph 15 above.

“Questions without notice at full Council

A Member of the Council may ask the Leader, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny or any member of the cabinet any question without notice on any non-operational matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affect the administrative area covered by the (Epping Forest District Council) or part of it or the inhabitants of that area or some of them, or which relates to a written response given by the Leader, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee or a member of the Cabinet.

Response to a question without notice

An answer to a question without notice may take the form of

- (a) direct oral answer from the Leader or, at the request of the leader, from another Member of the Cabinet:
- (b) direct oral answer from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or, at their request, from another member dealing with that issue as part of an Overview and Scrutiny review.
- (c) where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication;
- (d) where the reply cannot be conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner; or
- (e) where the question relates to an operational matter, the Leader, Chairman of Overview and scrutiny Committee or a member of the Cabinet will request that a response be given direct to the questioner by the relevant Chief Officer.”

(h) Questions by the public

17. Members felt that further encouragement should be given to the public to make use of the facility whereby they are allocated a 'slot' to ask questions at council meetings. Little use is made of this facility at present – a problem commonly experienced by many local authorities. One of the few local authorities in the region whose Council meetings feature questions from the public on a fairly regular basis is East Cambridgeshire, one of the local authorities visited by some Members of the panel in Autumn 2005.

18. An assessment has been made of the public questions procedure operating not only at East Cambridgeshire but of those several other local authorities. Fundamentally there seems to be little difference between those elsewhere and our own scheme. This would suggest that there are other reasons why the public in East Cambridgeshire make more extensive use of the facility. It would appear there are two significant contributory factors, namely, those connected with the close-knit nature of the population in East Cambridgeshire, and the publicity arrangements for the scheme.

19. In the Epping Forest District it is only really possible to influence the second factor ie that in relation to publicity. Information is being sought from East Cambridgeshire regarding their publicity arrangements. In the meantime it is proposed that consideration be given to our own scheme being re-publicised. Members' views are sought in that regard. Possibilities include features in the local newspaper(s), The Forester and on the EFDC website, plus the launch of a new guide to the general public, with an extensive distribution to the Town/Parish Councils and information centres/points.

STATE OF THE DISTRICT DEBATE – CORPORATE PLAN AND THE STRATEGIC PROMISES

Background on Past Debates

1. The Council decided in 2002 that it would dedicate at least one special Council meeting each year to discuss matters of importance to our communities. These meetings were designated as State of the District Debates.
2. These Debates provide Members with an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with members of the public in a formal way, albeit less formally than in full Council meeting with all the protocols these entail.
3. Since their inception, a total of 3 State of the District Debates have been held in July and October 2003, and in November 2004. The first was a general meeting with no central theme; the second focussed on housing services; and the third concerned community safety in the District.
4. In addition to those Members and Officers who attended, approximately 60 members of the public have also attended each Debate held so far.
5. Feedback from members of the public who have attended Debates has been generally positive, with many praising the Council for its openness and inclusiveness. There were, however, some reservations expressed about the third Debate on community safety in terms of its format and the time allotted for the Debate to take place.
6. A review of the Debates held to date resulted in a number of initial recommendations, which went before Scrutiny Committee in February 2005.

Scrutiny Committee Conclusions

1. Debates should take place as single meetings, and not be followed by any other Council meetings.
2. The focus of each Debate should be well defined and fairly narrow to enable useful detailed debate.
3. The length of the debate meeting should not exceed 2 hours.
4. Debate meetings should be well advertised in good time to enable members of the public to submit questions and attend the meeting.
5. Residents should be encouraged to put their questions to the Council themselves at the Debate. If a resident is uncomfortable with putting the question directly, he/she should be allowed to ask someone else to put the question on his/her behalf.

6. Cabinet Members and other Members of the Council should be given good opportunity to answer the questions, and give explanations of Council policy and any other relevant information.
7. Proper systematic feedback should be sought from all those attending the meeting in the form of questionnaires to be filled in at the end of the debate.
8. This feedback should be analysed properly and given to Cabinet and Council for action.
9. All issues brought up at Debates that require action should be logged and followed up by Council Officers. Feedback on action should be given to the Cabinet and Council through various minutes, and to all attending members of the public by direct correspondence.

Current Position

1. Following recent discussions with the Leader of the Council and with the Chief Executive's Team, it has been agreed to commit to a State of the District Debate in 2006 to discuss the Council's new Corporate Plan and its 5 Strategic Promises with members of the public, as part of the wider community engagement programme.
2. A planning meeting was held in January 2006 between the Chief Partnerships and Performance Officer, the Head of Customer Services and Communications, the Head of Performance and Strategy, and the Senior Committee Manager to take this forward.

Format for the next Debate

1. It is recommended to Leadership Group and the Chief Executive's Team that the format for the Corporate Plan and Strategic Promises Debate should be shown below:

Time (pm)	Activity	Lead(s)
6.30 – 7.00	Arrival and Refreshments	All
7.00 – 7.05	Introduction by the Leader of the Council	Leader/ Executive Member
7.05 – 7.55	Questions from the Public on the Corporate Plan and Strategic Promises	All
7.55 – 8.05	Refreshments and move into Workshops	All
8.05 – 8.50	5 workshops each covering 1 of the Strategic Promises	Executive Members/ Chief Officers/ Service Managers
8.50 – 9.00	Summary by the Leader of the Council	Leader/Executive Member

2. 3 separate public engagements events will be held between June and August each year on the Corporate Plan as part of its annual review. At the end of this process, an 'Away Day' involving Cabinet/Chief Executive's Team/Chief Officer's Team will be held in early September to review Corporate Plan Objectives and Actions.
3. It is proposed the State of the District Debate be held in late September 2006 to fit in with this programme and help in building ownership from everyone. Essentially, the Debate can then look back on the Plan's progress over the past year, and can look forward to the challenges it faces in the following year.
4. Questions from the public will be invited in advance of the Debate meeting, and these will be given priority on the night. Questions asked on the night could also be permitted but only if time allows.
5. Venue for the meeting will remain the Campus West Council Chamber in 2006, as there will be a need to book a series of break-out rooms in order to successfully co-ordinate the 5 workshops. Cost, availability and convenience are the primary considerations here.
6. Names and either e-mail or other contact details will be sought from all members of the public in attendance, as it is important to feedback all responses and actions to them quickly (ie no longer than 28 days after the event). This shows that the Council has listened to and understood all of the views expressed in the Debate.
7. To help to embed the Corporate Plan publicly and politically over its 4-year term, it would be helpful to hold further State of the District Debates on the Plan every year in September. This would still leave scope for at least one more Debate in March each year on an issue of particular interest to local communities. Debate meeting dates should be listed in advance in the Council's formal Timetable of Meetings for each Civic Year.
8. State of the District Debates will require a budget if they are to be conducted effectively – to cover publicity, refreshments, and other related administration. It is likely this can be found corporately from existing community engagement budgets.

Recommendations

1. This format for the next debate on the Corporate Plan and the Strategic Promises is agreed by Leadership Group and the Chief Executive's Team as set out above.
2. This format subsequently becomes the template for all future Debates to be held on issues of community interest in the District.

Partnerships & Performance Team
January 2006

9. Members Reports

9.1 At each ordinary meeting a:

Portfolio Holder (or their deputy)
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

can submit a written report to Council. The presentation of each report will be limited to five minutes.

10. Questions by Members

10.1 On Member Reports

A Member of the Council may ask a Cabinet Member, the Chair of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, any question without notice on any issue raised in his/her report to Council. Questions and supplementary questions on issues not included in such reports will be subject to the notice period set out at paragraph 10.5 of the Council Procedure Rules.

10.2 On reports of the Cabinet or a Committee

A Member of the Council may ask the Leader or the chair of a committee any question without notice upon an item of the report of the Cabinet or a committee when that item is being received or under consideration by the Council.

10.3 Questions on notice at full Council

- (a) Subject to Rule 10.5, a Member of the Council may ask the Leader a question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the district.
- (b) Subject to Rule 10.5, a Member of the Council may ask a Member of the Cabinet a question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the district.
- (c) Subject to Rule 10.5 a Member may ask the Member nominated pursuant to the Police Act 1996 a question concerning the operations and functions of the West Yorkshire Police Authority that affects the District.
- (d) Subject to Rule 10.5 a Member may ask the relevant Member nominated for the particular purpose a question concerning the operations and functions that affects the District of:
 - (1) West Yorkshire Fire and civil Defence Authority; or
 - (2) West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority; or

(3) West Yorkshire Joint Services Committee; or

(4) Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation.

10.4 Questions on notice at committees and sub-committees

At a meeting of a committee or sub-committee, subject to Rule 10.5, a Member of the committee or sub-committee may ask the chair of it a question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affect the district and which falls within the terms of reference of that committee or sub-committee.

10.5 Notice of questions

A Member may only ask a question under Rule 10.3 or 10.4 if either:

- (a) they have given at least seven clear working days notice in writing of the question to the committee Services Team for inclusion on the Council summons; or
- (b) the question has been submitted in writing to the Committee Services Team by 12 noon on Monday preceding an ordinary Council meeting;
- (c) the question relates to urgent matters, they have the consent of the Cabinet Member to whom the question is to be put and the content of the question is given to the Committee Services team by 9.00am on the day of the meeting.


10.6 Response.

An answer may take the form of:

- (a) a direct oral answer;
- (b) where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or
- (c) where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner.

10.7 Supplementary question

A Member asking a question under Rule 10.3 or 10.4 may ask one supplementary question without notice of the Member to whom the first question was asked. The supplemental question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply.

	REPORT TO COUNCIL	
	TO BE HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2006	
	Key Decision	NO
	Forward Plan Ref No	N/A
Strategic Theme: All	Portfolio	RESOURCES

REPORT OF: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CHAIRS

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. **SUBJECT: THE WORK OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES JANUARY 2006**
2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**
 - 2.1 To present a written report to Council on the collective work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
3. **RECOMMENDATION**
 - 3.1 That the report be noted.
4. **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**
 - 4.1 The Council procedure rules provide for the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to present a written report to Council on the collective work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
5. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**
 - 5.1 At the meeting of Council in June, the Scrutiny Chairs presented an Annual Report on their work during 2004/05 and in July asked Council to approve their Work Programme for 2005/06.
 - 5.2 Attached to this report is a further update that looks at how issues raised in 2004/05 are being implemented and details the progress in delivering the Work Programme for 2005/06.
6. **OPTIONS APPRAISAL**
 - 6.1 None.

THIS REPORT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ARE OPEN TO INSPECTION BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

7. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees helps to support the aims and objectives of the District's Community Strategy.

8. ENGAGEMENT

- 8.1 Overview and Scrutiny is committed to ensuring that key stakeholders, including service users and the general public are engaged in the work of Overview and Scrutiny.

9. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Overview and Scrutiny is committed to ensuring that its work supports the Corporate Performance Plan and helps Councillors fulfil their representational role.

Head of Service: Jackie Pepperell, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Resource Services

Contact Officer: Paul Jones, Overview and Scrutiny Manager (Joint Acting Member Services Manager), Room 50, County Hall, Wakefield, WF1 2QW

Telephone No: 01924 305940

Fax No: 01924 305314

E-mail address: pauljones@wakefield.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

SC at Wakefield -
8 Jan 06 Council

Review of the Work of Each Committee

Crime and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Feeling and Being Safer)



Chair: Councillor Mrs Mollie Wright

The Committee is continuing to monitor progress on the Community Safety Strategy Action Plans. Members were particularly encouraged to hear of the work being undertaken to develop a one-stop shop approach to domestic abuse in line with the Cardiff model and look forward to receiving an update on progress from the Council's Domestic Violence Co-ordinator at their next meeting.

Plans are being made to encourage greater public involvement in the committee's inquiries by holding the meetings at different venues across the district. Starting in February, it is planned to hold the meeting in Outwood and invite representatives of the Neighbourhood Policing Team, Community Safety Area Group, local community groups and Local Area Partnership. It is hoped that this will provide members with a better understanding of the issues affecting the varied communities across our district.

Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Investing in Our People)



Chair: Councillor Bryan Denson

The main focus of the Committee's work over the period since the last report to Council is the Attendance & Exclusions Inquiry. This Inquiry is looking at the links between truancy, exclusions and underachievement and is investigating the underlying reasons why children skip school or become excluded.

The Inquiry is intended to compliment the Council's continued drive to improve behaviour and attendance. The rationale for this Inquiry is to consider how effective school and LEA policies address the adverse affects of these issues and to assist them in improving attainment across the board. In particular the Inquiry will:

1. Assist schools and the LEA to meet and where possible exceed specified targets set out in the Education Development Plan, Corporate Performance Plan and the Community Strategy

2. Assist schools and the LEA in adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach to bullying.

The Attendance and Exclusions Working Group has met to further scope this work. A number of site visits have taken place including, Sandal Magna J&I, City High, Airedale Infants, Park Junior School and Horbury High. Issues have included the impact of positive discipline and an assessment of the impact of low-level classroom disruption on under-achievement. The Working Group is considering various means of parental engagement and has received evidence from a number of parents already. Parental involvement in multi-ethnic schools is also a feature of the inquiry, particularly communication with parents, extended absences and home school liaison. The Committee has received evidence from the Head of Equality and Diversity, which has addressed many of these issues.

The Committee has commenced its review of school-based procurement and has received a briefing from the Head of Partnering and Procurement at their meeting held on the 14 November 2005. The purpose of the briefing was to help pinpoint the key issues in order to help Members scope the project and identify the key lines of inquiry. A follow-up session will take place with the LEA to progress the inquiry and a meeting and Member visit is to take place with Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO) on the 11 January 2006.

The Committee has reviewed the implementation of the School Workforce Re-Modelling agreement and considered the issues within a progress report at their meeting held on the 14 November 2005, and agreed to invite the Assistant Chief Education Officer (Resources and Performance Management) to address the supplementary issues raised including; funding; PPA time, leadership and management time; supply teachers; TLR restructuring, sustainability and work life balance. The Committee will be looking at case studies of schools that have successfully implemented the agreement and those who have experienced difficulties with a view to identifying critical factors between the two and where possible share best practice. Members will also be looking for evidence of how the LEA will evaluate the impact of the agreement over time in relation to standards and attainment.

Liveability Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Improving Our Places)



Chair: Councillor Clive Tennant

The Committee's Equalities and Race Relations Task Group continues to make good progress with its inquiry and has met young people on the Council's Modern Apprenticeship Scheme and National Graduate Development Programme. The Group is now planning to look at how the Council is perceived as an employer by its existing employees.

The land drainage inquiry is examining how well potential flood risk is being managed across the district, both by the Council and other agencies with land drainage responsibilities. In December the Committee considered the Council's new action plans to address these issues and is now looking forward to hearing the Environment Agency's point of view concerning the watercourses for which it is responsible, and how they work with the Council to reduce flood risk in the district.

A new inquiry is due to be initiated to review the effectiveness of the Compact with Community and Voluntary Organisations and how the Council is supporting its development.

Local Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Developing a Dynamic Local Economy)




Chair: Councillor Melvyn Taylor

The Committee dedicated their December meeting to looking at the Regeneration Strategy. The Deputy Chief Executive and Deputy Leader attended the meeting to provide the Committee with an opportunity to discuss the outline Strategy at the options stage and enable Members to challenge the strategic choices and priorities before the draft Strategy is finalised.

The Committee have commenced their inquiry into 'Transport Accessibility' and have met with Harry Mason, Chair of the Special Interest Group for the Physically Disabled and Sensory Impaired, and Steve Brumby, Chair of the Wakefield Access Group. A Working Group is now being established to take this issue forward and will have its first meeting next month.

The Rail Working Group are concluding their report into Rail Safety at Kirkgate Station.

The inquiry into 'Support for Small and Medium Enterprises' is ongoing and the Committee hope to meet with representatives from the Enterprise Agency Business Link and the Wakefield District Partnership in February.

	<p>REPORT TO COUNCIL</p> <p>TO BE HELD ON 18 January 2006</p>
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REPORT OF: Councillor Phillip Dobson, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

1. **SUBJECT: REGENERATION & HOUSING REPORT STATEMENT**
2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update members on Regeneration and Housing Issues.

2.1 **City Centre Regeneration**

Shortly before Christmas the Council completed the acquisition of the Express Dairy Site at Westgate from Arla Foods. This is another important step in the land assembly process, which will enable the Westgate Project to start on site at the end of the year. Officers are currently working on a draft Development Agreement with English Cities Fund covering future land transfers and other details of the project.

2.2 **The Local Development Framework**

Work on the various parts of the Local Development Framework is now well underway. Members have had the opportunity of attending a briefing on the latest document for consultation our "Preferred Options for Core Strategy and the Development Control Policies" on the 11th January. This consultation is important as – dull as they might sometimes seem – it will be these strategies and policies that will govern how we determine planning applications in the years ahead. I would encourage all of you to take a look at the document and feed any comments you have back to the Spatial Policy Team at Newton Bar. The Wakefield City Centre Plan, which is another important part of the LDF, is also beginning to emerge and as part of the public consultation process a very well attended workshop was held on the 30th November at the Elizabethan Gallery where the future of development in the City Centre was forcefully debated. This is just the beginning of the process of developing proposals for the City.

THIS REPORT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ARE OPEN TO INSPECTION BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

2.3 **The Local Transport Plan**

The Second West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan, which was approved as a draft and sent to the Department for Transport last summer, is to be formally submitted to the Secretary of State in March. The final Plan will be reported to Cabinet and Council for approval in February. The government have scored the draft plan as promising with scope for improvement and the Annual Review of delivery of transport projects was scored as good which resulted in West Yorkshire receiving 5% more funding.

2.4 **Regeneration Strategy**

I asked officers to begin a review of the present Regeneration Strategy, firstly to reflect the significant strides that we have already made in delivering our priorities but also to develop the emphasis of our strategy in the area of skills and enterprise both important areas where we need to develop our thinking and increase our effectiveness. The draft Strategy will be ready by the end of March and to start the process of debating the issues that we need to address we had a very useful discussion at the Local Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee just before Christmas. We will be developing this work over the coming weeks.

2.5 **Castleford Regeneration**

The first phase of the Edinburgh House proposals for Castleford received approval at Planning and Highways Committee on 5 January 2006. The scheme will provide new retail space to meet modern retail needs, a 58 bedroom hotel and a restaurant bar.

The building is of a modern design but does include brickwork and render which are used on other buildings in the centre of Castleford.

Councillor Phillip Dobson
Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

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COUNCIL – 7 DECEMBER 2005

(ii) **Mr Michael Travis**

It was with sadness that the Mayor informed Council of the sudden and unexpected death of the Deputy Mayor's brother, Mr Michael Travis. The Mayor, on behalf of Council expressed the deepest sympathy of all Council Members to Councillor Travis and his family at this sad time.

(iii) **PC Sharon Beshenesky and PC Teresa Milburn**

The Mayor referred to the recent tragedy involving the shooting and murder of PC Sharon Beshenesky and the attempted murder of PC Teresa Milburn in Bradford on 18 November 2005. The Mayor and Mayoress had written to the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire expressing the Council's sympathy and support for the Officers families and colleagues. The Mayor and Mayoress had attended a brief service and two minutes silence in Centenary Square, Bradford on Friday, 25 November. A letter of appreciation from the Chief Constable had been received.

Members observed a minute's silence in memory of PC Beshenesky and Mr Michael Travis.

97. **LEADER'S REPORT**

The Leader informed Council that Elaine McHale, Corporate Director (Social Services and Health) had recently been appointed to the post of Director of Children's Services and wished her well in what would be a challenging role developing services for children and young people across the District. The Leader placed on record his thanks and appreciation to John McLeod, Corporate Director (Education and Culture), for his outstanding contribution to education in the District since becoming Chief Education Officer in 1994.

The Leader was pleased to inform Council that the official opening of Featherstone Swimming Pool would take place on Saturday 10 December 2005 and was pleased with the positive feedback received from users of the facility.

98. **LEADER'S QUESTION TIME**

No questions had been received.

99. **CABINET MEMBER REPORTS - 9.1 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE**

Consideration was given to individual reports of Cabinet Members, which had been circulated with the Council Summons. A maximum of fifteen minutes was allocated to each Cabinet Member to briefly introduce the written report and answer questions and brief comments made by Members.

(i) Councillor P Dobson, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration gave a brief update on regeneration and strategic housing issues. In formally moving the report the Deputy Leader drew the attention of Council to the fact that the progress of the initiatives detailed in the report depended to a large degree on a public transport infrastructure, which would deliver them and the wider regeneration initiatives in the District. Further to the recent notice of the withdrawal of bus services by Arriva, the Deputy Leader reported that this required a response by the Council on the potentially adverse impact they would have on the economic, social and environmental well-being of the District. The Deputy Leader pointed out that whilst the Council was not directly responsible for the provision of bus services in the District, it was represented on the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority, which had an oversight of the Passenger Transport Executive (Métro). In view of the concerns expressed by

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COUNCIL – 7 DECEMBER 2005

Members at the impact of the proposed bus service reductions on their constituents, the Deputy Leader asked the Chief Executive on behalf of Council to liaise with Metro through the Council's PTA representatives to continue discussions with Arriva. This would include arrangements to enable Members to make their own representations and to advise on the most appropriate arrangements which would enable the Council to fully debate the issue and make an informed decision on Arriva's proposals.

Further comments made by Councillor Harrison at the previous meeting, the Deputy Leader informed Council that the most appropriate way of delivering a Members' Seminar on Design was being investigated.

In response to concerns and comments raised by Councillors Atkinson, Calvert, Hudson, Hazell MBE, P Walker and Jenkins, Councillor Dobson acknowledged the adverse impact the proposals would have in the Wards identified and noted the points raised with regard to Deregulation. Metro would further discuss the issues with Arriva and it was hoped that further amendments would be made to improve the situation. In response to a final question from Councillor Metcalfe with regard to affordable housing, Councillor Dobson accepted the gravity of the issue both locally and nationally.

(ii) Councillor Mrs O M Rowley, Portfolio Holder for Adults and Health submitted an update of developments within her Portfolio. In response to a question from Councillor Colley, with regard to the Lawefield Lane Centre, Councillor Mrs Rowley confirmed that the proposals to develop new day opportunities for people with learning disabilities were continuing.

(iii) Councillor W R Jenkins, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People gave a brief update of developments within his Portfolio. Councillor Jenkins placed on record his own tribute to John McLeod for his work and dedication in building the Wakefield Local Education Authority into one of the finest in England and the best in both West and South Yorkshire. Councillor Jenkins congratulated Elaine McHale and informed Council that the pace of change would continue unabated.

Councillor Jenkins was also delighted to inform Council that Gawthorpe Junior and Infants School was celebrating the announcement that they were in the top fifty most improved schools in the country out of an astonishing 16,500 primary schools. Four other Wakefield schools were also congratulated in a report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools those being Craggstone St James Junior & Infants School, Netherton Junior & Infants School, South Ossett Infants School and Wakefield City High School. Councillor Jenkins congratulated the head teachers, teachers, pupils, parents, governors and all school staff for their collective achievements.

In response to tributes paid to John McLeod by Councillors Harrison, P Walker, Hazell and Denson, Councillor Jenkins in noting the tributes would relay the comments to Mr McLeod.

(iv) Councillor Mrs D M Jeffery, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Tourism and Sport gave a brief update of developments within her Portfolio. Councillor Mrs Jeffery placed on record her thanks to the staff of Knottingley Sports Centre for the professional manner in which they had responded to an evacuation of local houses following a gas leak. Members of the community had spent the night in the Sports Centre and staff had ensured their stay was as comfortable as possible.

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Report to Policy Working Group 3

Date of meeting: 20 September 2004

Portfolio: Planning and Economic Development

Subject: Area Plans Sub-Committees - Review

Officer contact for further information: Chris Overend, ext. 4247.

Committee Secretary: A Hendry, ext.4246



Recommendations:

1. **To review the current structure of Area Plans Sub-Committees as follows:**
 - (a) **to adopt a three Sub-Committee structure on grounds of accessibility, workload and improving the throughput of planning applications;**
 - (b) **to combine Area Plans Sub-Committees 'B' (Epping) and 'C' (Ongar Area) to achieve (a) above;**
 - (c) **to hold Area Plans Sub-Committees 'A', 'B' and 'C' on a three week cycle so as to speed up the process of handling planning applications;**
 - (d) **to determine the number of members to serve on the new combined Sub-Committee.**
2. **To consider introducing occasional meetings between Area Plans Sub-Committee Chairmen, the Chairman of the District Development Control Committee, Lead Planning Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development to discuss any common issues which may arise; and**
3. **to consider the frequency of meetings under (2) above.**

Report:

1. (Head of Planning and Economic Development/Head of Research and Democratic Services) Following changes to the area boundaries implemented in May 2002 and increased officer delegation implemented in December 2002, it is felt that it is now appropriate to review the operation of the Council's four Area Plans Sub-Committees. Such a review was promised in the Development Control Service Improvement Plan adopted in November 2002 and the 2003/4 Service Plan. Issues which arise are geographical cohesion, workload, venues and access as well as operational improvements.

Geographical Cohesion

2. Area 'A' (Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and Loughton) and Area 'D' (Epping Upland, Nazeing, Roydon and Waltham Abbey) are relatively compact and discrete geographical areas. Area 'B' (Epping, Theydon Bois, Lambourne and the southern part of North Weald) is a grouping of more diverse parishes but covers a relatively

compact area. Area 'C' (Ongar and all the parishes east of Harlow and Area 'B') has little geographical cohesion since it includes Parishes as far apart as Stapleford Abbots in the south and Sheering in the north.

Workload

3. In the 12 months from January-December 2003:
 - (i) Area Sub 'A' considered 178 applications (average of 14.8 per meeting) with a maximum of 23 and a minimum of 8;
 - (ii) Area Sub 'B' considered 61 applications (average of 5.1 per meeting) with a maximum of 8 and a minimum of 2;
 - (iii) Area Sub 'C' considered 67 applications (average of 5.6 per meeting) with a maximum of 9 and a minimum of 2; and
 - (iv) Area Sub 'D' considered 74 applications (average of 6.2 per meeting) with a maximum of 12 and a minimum of 3.
4. It can be seen that the number of applications considered at Area Sub-Committee 'A' exceeded the other committee workloads, almost amounting to the total for the other three combined.

Venues

5. Area Sub 'A' meets in the Dining Hall at Roding Valley School. It is a large room but since it is a large Committee with 15 members and significant public interest from large agenda, the venue is not over big. The acoustics suffer from refrigeration equipment which operates in the vicinity.
6. Area Sub 'B' meets in the Council Chamber at the Civic Offices.
7. Area Sub 'C' meets at Shelley Primary School, where furniture is undersized and the location is deep within a residential estate. There is no bus route to the school.
8. Area Sub 'D' used to meet at Waltham Abbey Town Hall in a large hall with very poor acoustics although another venue in Roydon was used from time to time. The Committee now regularly meets at Saxon Way Community Centre in a room better suited.
9. Access for disabled people is satisfactory at all four venues.

Issues and Options

10. Despite the high number of applications considered each month by Area Plans Sub 'A', this operates as an efficient committee serving a traditional grouping of local areas in a central venue, well served by public transport. Members should however consider whether the other groupings need to be altered in order to balance the workload to some degree, perhaps combining two of the areas to form three area committees in total. Three Area Sub-Committees on a three week cycle would assist with meeting statutory targets for processing planning applications by shortening the period an application would need to wait for a meeting.
11. In terms of geography, it would be logical to divide areas 'B' and 'C' more evenly but

that would reduce the workload for Area 'C' to an unsustainable level. Thus, the most effective option appears to be to combine Areas 'B' and 'C' and centre these on Epping which is well served by public transport, eliminating the access problems and other issues associated with Shelley School. The area would remain a rather disparate geographical area but could be said to comprise most of the former Epping and Ongar Rural District. Furthermore, the elimination of Shelley School from the schedule of venues would result in a saving of £500 per annum.

Membership of Combined Sub-Committee

12. Currently Area Plans Sub 'B' and 'C' comprise all members in the relevant areas as follows:

Committee	Number of Members
Plans 'B'	9 members
Plans 'C'	10 members
Total	19 members

13. Combining the two Sub-Committees together would create a new body of 19 Councillors. To be exempt from pro rata requirements (i.e. a proportional representation for every political group on the Council irrespective of the area which they represent), an Area Plans Sub-Committee has to be an "Area Committee" under Government legislation. The tests for Area Committee status are as follows:

- (i) the Committee established solely of members elected to wards in the areas concerned;
- (ii) the Committee is concerned with discharging the functions of the authority;
- (iii) the area concerned does not exceed 2/5ths of the total area of the District or 2/5ths of the total population of the District.

14. The combined areas constitute 32.6% of the District's population and 63.2% of the area of the District. In establishing a Committee with area status either the population or the area criteria should be met. With this in mind, a combined Sub-Committee 'B' and 'C' can be treated as a local committee.

15. If members feel that a Sub-Committee of 19 members is too large, membership could be set at a lower figure and allocated pro rata between the political groups represented in the wards covered. This is the procedure adopted in relation to Area Plans Sub 'A', which comprises 15 members.

16. Within the area covered by the combined 'B' and 'C' Sub-Committees the pro rata between the political groups concerned is as follows:

Conservative: 11 (57.894%)
 Lib Dem: 6 (31.578%)
 Independent: 1 (5.263%)
 Labour: 1 (5.263%)

These percentages would be applied to the total number of seats for the Committee which members prefer.

17. These various changes would require amendments to the Council's Constitution.

Liaison on Common Issues

18. In order to achieve consistency between the Area Committees members may also wish to consider the value of regular (say twice a year) meetings, between Chairmen of Sub-Committees, lead planning officers, the Chairman of District Development Control Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development. This group could discuss common issues or topics which have arisen at meetings or elsewhere. The discussion should avoid individual planning applications etc due for consideration as the Portfolio Holder would not be able to be involved in those matters.

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**Constitutional Affairs
Standing Scrutiny Panel
(27.3.06)**

AREA PLANS SUB COMMITTEES - STATISTICS (MARCH 2005-2006)

1. AREA SUB COMMITTEE 'A'	
Parish	No. of Items Considered
Buckhurst Hill	35
Chigwell	49
Loughton	86
Sub Total	170

2. AREA SUB COMMITTEE 'B'	
Parish	No. of Items Considered
Epping	61
Lambourne	4
North Weald*	14
Theydon Bois	20
Theydon Mount	1
Sub Total	100

3. AREA SUB COMMITTEE 'C'	
Parish	No. of Items Considered
Fyfield	1
High Ongar	8
Matching	6
Moreton, Bobbingworth and Lavers	4
North Weald*	5
Ongar	10
Rodings	2
Sheering	3
Stanford Rivers	3
Stapleford Abbotts	6
Stapleford Tawney	2
Theydon Garnon	3
Theydon Mount	1
Willingale	2
Sub Total	56

4. AREA SUB COMMITTEE 'D'	
Parish	No. of Items Considered
Epping Upland	2
Nazeing	26
Roydon	14
Waltham Abbey	26
Sub Total	68
TOTAL	394

* North Weald Parish appears in 2 Area Plans Sub Areas.