

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**NOTES OF A MEETING OF CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERS SERVICES SCRUTINY**  
**STANDING PANEL**  
**HELD ON MONDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2006**  
**IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING**  
**AT 7.30 - 9.28 PM**

<b>Members Present:</b>	R Morgan (Chairman), Mrs P Brooks, R Church, R D'Souza, Mrs A Haigh, J Markham, Mrs P Smith and Mrs L Wagland
<b>Other members present:</b>	K Angold-Stephens, Mrs D Borton, M Colling, Mrs D Collins, R Frankel, D Jacobs, D Kelly, J Knapman, P McMillan, B Sandler, Mrs M Sartin, P Spencer, Mrs J H Whitehouse and K Wright
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	M Cohen, J Demetriou and Mrs P Richardson
<b>Officers Present</b>	I Willett (Head of Research and Democratic Services), B Land (Assistant Head of Planning and Economic Development), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)
<b>Also in attendance:</b>	Councillor E Borton (Nazeing Parish Council) and Councillor Ms G Castle (Nazeing Parish Council)

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**39. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

None reported.

**40. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

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

**41. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 10 OCTOBER 2006**

Noted.

**42. TERMS OF REFERENCE/ WORK PROGRAMME**

Noted.

**43. AREA PLANS SUB - COMMITTEES - REVIEW OF STRUCTURE**

The Panel gave further consideration to the review of the structure of the Area Plans Sub – Committees.

The Panel considered responses submitted to the consultation agreed at an earlier meeting of the Panel submitted from Ongar, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Roydon, Epping, Morton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers, Stanford Rivers and Nazeing Parish Councils and Loughton Town Council. They also considered proposals from EFDC Councillors Mrs A Grigg and D Jacobs.

The Panel were reminded of the principles that they had agreed should underpin any changes and the need to follow these during the consideration of the issue at this

meeting. These were aimed at maximising member involvement and improving the efficiency of the planning process, ensuring the retention of the local nature of the arrangements and equalising the balance of workload between the sub - committees.

**(a) Local Council Responses**

The Panel considered each of the responses in turn. Overall they suggested that the sub-committees should remain area based and made up of the local Members from the wards served to recognise the differing needs of the diverse areas in the District.

**(b) Member Proposals**

Councillor Jacobs presented his own two options based on an assessment of the workload statistics submitted at the last meeting of the Panel. The first proposed a three sub – committee structure each ascribed to an area of the District - West, East, and South. The Panel noted that this would raise the number of meetings per sub – committee from twelve to sixteen and therefore result in an increase in the turnaround time for applications which was welcomed. His second option proposed that a four sub – committee structure be retained with changes to the areas each covered to meet the identified principles of the review. Members considered Councillors Mrs Griggs report and options and expressed support for the proposal but suggested some changes.

In response to the proposals the following comments were made:

(i) there was sympathy for the concerns expressed by some of the Local Councils at the proposal to introduce a three sub – committee structure covering larger areas. It was felt that this alternative would result in Members voting on applications relating to areas remote from their wards which they might not be familiar with. It was questioned whether the alternative would improve the quality of decisions. A Member expressed regret at the relocation of sub – committee meetings back to the Civic Offices and drew attention to the proposal to create a five sub – committee serving smaller geographical areas (as proposed by Councillor Kelly) to ensure that Members determined planning issues local to them.

(ii) representatives of the Nazeing area suggested that the urban and rural wards should be dealt with separately to recognise their distinct needs. A member reported figures suggesting that the majority of the applications from the area concerned rural development, nevertheless, most of the membership of its Sub – Committee – Area Plans ‘D’ - served wards urban in character. It was suggested that despite the shortcoming identified with the grouping of rural areas, the option should still be pursued in view of the benefits that could be achieved in terms of improving quality.

(iii) in relation to Councillor Jacobs proposals (option 1) some Members supported the overall structure of the proposal to group together the rural parishes and the urban wards but suggested some changes to the boundaries envisaged mainly to enlarge the areas now covered by the present Area Plans C. It was proposed that consideration be given to moving Nazeing, Roydon, or Lambourne into this area. Conversely, some Members expressed concern at the proposal to group together the rural areas on the basis that Members might not be familiar with rural locations distant to them. This could result in them having to travel relatively long distances to site visits - an option which they liked to pursue to gather first hand evidence, which would place pressure on their time.

(vi) several Members expressed support for the present four sub – committee structure with some changes to the present boundaries to equalise the balance of work between the sub – committees and to allow all Members to serve on a sub – committee. It was questioned whether the membership of Area Plans Sub – Committee ‘C’ could be expanded through provision for external co-optees to address the issues with ensuring a quorate for meetings.

(v) In relation to the urban wards to the south of the District, the Members of Area Plans Sub – Committee ‘A’ present expressed support for the existing structure of the sub – committee stating that it worked well. Some support was expressed for giving all Members the opportunity to serve on the sub - committee. It was considered whether this could be achieved under the present structure and whether the current venue could accommodate such an expansion.

### **(c) Performance Statistics**

In relation to Planning Performance, the Planning Officer clarified that should a three weekly, three Sub – Committee structure be introduced, the Local Councils would still be allocated twenty working days for the submission of comments on cases. It was anticipated that the move would help cases reach committee faster and speed up the process and improve performance in this respect.

It was questioned whether any reduction in the number of Sub – Committees would result in financial savings. If this was the case the question was whether improvements in the quality of the decision making process could be achieved.

The Council was currently meeting all three of the targets set by central government in respect of development control performance but was falling short of achieving two of the three best value targets requiring ‘top quartile’ performance. Members felt that this requirement should not be placed ahead of the priority to retain area based committee or compromise the quality of the decision making process.

### **ACTION:**

Having carefully the view of the local Members and the various options identified the Panel asked officers to work up the following options for consideration at the next meeting on 4 December 2006.

#### **Option (a)**

A three sub – committee structure comprising:

Existing Area Plans ‘A’ - plus the following :

A new Area Sub – Committee ‘East’ – covering wards to the east

A new Area Sub – Committee ‘West’ – covering wards to the west

#### **Option (b)**

A three sub – committee structure comprising

Existing Area Plans ‘A’ - plus the following:

A new Urban Area Sub – Committee – for all urban areas outside existing Plans ‘A’

A new Rural Area Sub – Committee – covering all rural wards

**Option (c)**

A four sub – committee structure as per present with an enlarged Area Plans Area Plans ‘C’ through the addition of extra wards (say Nazeing, Roydon or Lambourne as indicated)

**Option (d)**

The present structure with Area Plans ‘B’ and ‘C’ combined.

**Option (e)**

No change.

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

Report on Sub – Group review of Civic Ceremonial .

**45. FUTURE MEETINGS**

Noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on 4 December 2006.

It was also noted that the meeting scheduled for 8 February 2007 had been brought forward to 6 February 2006.