# EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
# COMMITTEE MINUTES

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| **Committee:** | Constitution and Members Services Scrutiny Standing Panel | **Date:** | Tuesday, 4 March 2008 |
| **Place:** | Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping | **Time:** | 7.30 - 8.55 pm |
| **Members Present:** | R Church (Chairman), J Demetriou, D Jacobs, Mrs M McEwen, T Richardson, D Stallan and Mrs J H Whitehouse | | |
| **Other Councillors:** | Mrs D Collins, K Chana, Mrs P Smith and C Whitbread | | |
| **Apologies:** | B Rolfe and R Morgan | | |
| **Officers Present:** | I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive) | | |

## 16. Substitute Members

Noted that Councillor K Chana was attending the meeting as substitute for Councillor B Rolfe.

## 17. Declaration Of Interests

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

## 18. Notes of the last meeting - 15 January 2008

Agreed subject to the deletion of "Mrs" from Minute 9 (substitute members) in respect of Councillor J Demetriou.

## 19. Work Programme

The Panel noted the following points in relation to the current Work Programme:

**(a) Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (Work Programme Item 5)**

Noted that a report on the new forms of executive provided by the Act was due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 March 2008 and by the full Council on 22 April 2008.

It was also noted that the previous report on whole Council elections under the 2007 Act had been adopted by the Council on 19 February 2008.

It was further noted that forthcoming reports on the provisions of the Act concerning Local Strategic Partnerships and Overview and Scrutiny would now have to await the publication of further Government Regulations and would need to be included in the Work Programme for 2008/9.

**20.     Member Training Review**

The Panel received a report from the Assistant to the Chief Executive on the results of consultation with members of the Council and officers on next year's Member Training Programme.  The Panel received the comments made by Councillors, a list of the member training courses which had been in the programme for the current year, an analysis of attendances at each of those courses and a copy of the New Member Induction Course which had been held in May 2007.  The Panel then considered the general content of the Training Programme for next year as follows:

**(a)     Member Induction - May 2008**

It was agreed that the same basic structure for the induction seminar should continue next year, the only change being requested was to delay the start time until 7.00 p.m. to assist members who were at work during the day to arrive on time.

**(b)     Courses which could be discontinued**

The Panel felt that as the Council was about to launch webcasting on a permanent rather than trial basis in the near future, that media skills training should concentrate on the advanced module rather than the radio interview version which had been used for several years.

In relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Review Session, the Assistant to the Chief Executive was asked to check on whether a forward data had already agreed.  The Panel felt that it was possible that this review had moved to a session every two years in which case that session could be dropped from the programme for 2008/9.

**(c)     New Courses**

The Panel asked for consideration to be given to the following new courses or existing courses which were configured differently.

New Courses requested included Freedom of Information/Data Protection Act for Members, an Awareness Session on Housing Services including the operation of the HRA which had been held two or three years ago and had proved very popular.

In relation to Planning Services a number of courses were requested including: the usual Planning Induction Course designed specifically for new members or for existing members as a refresher, a course on Section 106 Agreements, a course on the Local Development Framework and other Forward Planning Issues.

The Panel were informed that arrangements were being made for a training course on Telecom Masts during 2007/8 and they asked that if there was sufficient demand, this course be repeated at some point during 2007/8.

The Panel asked to consider the need for the CIPFA training on Local Government Finance to be repeated during the year.  Members of the Panel were supportive of this course but asked that the Director of Finance and ICT should include within the course a session on the Council's own budget papers which the Panel felt were ill understood by some members.  They also asked that he give a presentation on his role as Chief Financial Officer, a statutory position within the Council.

**(d)     ICT Courses**

The normal courses regarding use of the "COMs" system were approved for the next year's programme. The Panel was interested in the idea of "drop-in" sessions for members where they could meet IT staff from the Council and deal with any minor problems they were experiencing. However, it was explained that ICT was in the process of being re-organised and due to other workload factors these courses could not be guaranteed during the forthcoming year but would be kept under review and notified if they proved feasible.

**(e)      Awareness Sessions**

The Panel indicated that, in addition to the Awareness Session requested on Housing/HRA matters, they would like to see within the programme an Awareness Session on "cleaner safer greener" services and a further session on Emergency Planning both in terms of general awareness and specific training for Rest Centres, which might possibly be combined in a single session.

**(f)      Skills Training**

The Panel indicated that they were interested in the idea of combining several of the skills courses in one daytime session which would offer training in matters such as chairmanship, effective reading, public speaking, questioning and presentation skills rather than longer in-depth courses. The Assistant to the Chief Executive agreed to look into this. However, the Panel were keen to see a specific session on Questioning Skills as a more detailed course.

The Panel were keen to see a repeat of the "dealing with difficult people" training.

**(g)      Delivery of Courses**

The Panel accepted that as a result of the recent changes in the cycle of Area Plans Sub-Committee meetings, which had moved to a three week cycle, there would be a reduction in fewer evenings being available for training courses. Officers were asked therefore to consider new ways of delivering courses to recognise the times when members would meet together without taking up valuable free evenings.

Among the suggestions made were that courses could be split into different sessions and held either before or after appropriate Scrutiny Panels, Cabinet Committees or other meetings. Members felt that courses on related subjects might be better delivered as a joint session not on separate dates.

The Panel made the general point that they wished to see more regular updating of members on issues as the year progressed. The example of Planning was particularly highlighted and the feeling was that officers should take advantage of various meetings of Area Plans Subs etc when members would already be at the offices and might benefit from short training sessions before or after the meeting.

**(h)      Code of Conduct/Planning Protocol**

The Panel agreed that these two courses should continue as in previous years.

**(i)      Mandatory Courses**

The Panel considered suggestions in the Assistant to the Chief Executive's report regarding ways of trying to increase member attendance training courses. A list of possible Mandatory Courses and the members who should regard attendance as compulsory was submitted and these were agreed as follows:

| Subject | Mandatory For |
|---|---|
| All Planning Courses | All Members of the Council who serve on Area Plans Sub-Committees. |
| Code of Conduct | All members. |
| Planning Protocol | All members. |
| ICT/COMs | All members. |
| Licensing Committee | Licensing Committee members. |
| Housing Appeals/Staff Appeals/Complaints | Panel members. |

Members asked that those courses such as Licensing etc which were designed specifically for those members who had been appointed to those bodies should nevertheless be available to other members for information and general background knowledge.  As to monitoring attendance, the Panel saw this role as being a matter for the politcal groups and their headers.

**(j)    Partnership Policies**

The Panel discussed the importance of members being made more aware of the increasing amount of partnership working between Councils and other public bodies. The Assistant to the Chief Executive explained that work was currently being undertaken to develop a Partnership policy for the Council but this was some way at present from completion.  The Panel accepted that it would be premature to hold training courses on this subject until the policy itself was under consideration by the Council and this was therefore agreed as being a "reserve" item for next year's programme to be brought forward when the policy was in being.

The Committee noted that a report will be submitted to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the training programme and that in the meantime the Assistant to the Chief Executive would continue with work to develop the programme and consult members and Service Directors on the content.

**(k)   Planning Courses**

The Panel agreed that the usual introductory course for new members should continue.  Members supported a proposal for a specific course on forward planning issues such as the Local Development Framework. A course on Section 106 Agreements was also supported and on the process for planning appeals.

It was reported that training on telecommunication issues for planning was to be held in 2007/08 and it was felt by the Panel that this might be covered during 2008/9 if thought necessary.

There were comments from the Panel about the need for regular progress reporting on planning matters and officers were asked to see whether such sessions could be held before or after Area Plans Sub-Committee or other meetings and possibly integrated with courses proposed on Section 106 Agreements, Telecommunications and Planning Appeals.  The Panel felt that holding such progress/issue briefings

might improve attendance as Councillors would be available already.

**21.    Reports to be made to the Next Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Panel were informed that the report from this meeting will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2008 and that a report from the last meeting of this Panel will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 March 2008 on Executive Constitutions.

**22.    Future Meetings**

The next programmed Meeting of the Panel would be held on 28 April 2008 at 7.30 p.m. in Committee Room No.1.

**CHAIRMAN**