

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERS SERVICES SCRUTINY
STANDING PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2007
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 8.45 PM

Members Present: R Church (Chairman), R Morgan (Vice-Chairman), J Demetriou, R D'Souza, D Jacobs, T Richardson, D Stallan, Mrs J H Whitehouse and H Ulkun

Other members present:

Apologies for Absence: J Markham, Mrs M McEwen and B Rolfe

Officers Present I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

Noted that Councillor Ulkun was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Mrs McEwen.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

3. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 20 NOVEMBER 2007

The Panel considered the notes of the last meeting.

Review of meeting cycle of Area Plans Sub – Committees (Note 33).

The notes were agreed subject to note 33 being amended by deleting the words 'The Panel balanced the merits of the proposals against the costs (extra meetings, officer time and resources)' from the last paragraph.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

Review of meeting cycle of Area Plans Sub – Committee.

It was noted that a formal report on the conclusions reached at the last meeting regarding the desirability of the introduction of a three weekly Area Plans Sub – Cycle had been submitted to the 13 December 2007 OSC for endorsement prior to submission to Council.

Agreed that details of the likely cost of the change be circulated for the 13 December 2007 OSC.

Agreed that the Committee' response to the report be made available for information before the 18 December 2007 Council meeting. **Action:** Officers to e-mail Members.

It was noted that provision had been made in next year' calendar for a three weekly cycle should this be approved.

It was also suggested that turnaround times for individual areas be assessed to see whether the shortfalls in performance related only to certain wards.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007 - SUMMARY

The Panel considered the summary.

(a) Overview and Scrutiny (Part 5 – Chapter 2)

It was clarified that the provisions in the above related specifically to the Local Area Agreements and should be considered in that context. It did not affect the wider powers elsewhere in the Act for allowing Scrutiny Committees to require relevant outside bodies to appear before them and submit information.

(b) Ethical Sandards (Part 10 – Chapter 1)

It was felt that Members subject to complaints should receive early notification of the investigation to make them aware of the investigation. It was questioned whether the changes provided for such action?

Noted that new guidance on this was anticipated

(c) Patient and Public Involvement in Health and Social Care (Part 14)

A Members reported on uncertainties over the role and work of the new Public and Patient Involvement Forum. There was a need to facilitate involvement in this body and to keep an eye on this situation.

6. ELECTORAL CYCLE

The Panel considered a report on the Electoral Cycle. The Panel considered:

- (i) written material obtained from other local authorities in connection with whole Council elections/elections by thirds;
- (ii) whether in principle, the option for this Council to adopt whole Council elections should be taken pursued;
- (iii) Subject to (2) above:
 - (a) whether to hold a member seminar on the issue;
 - (b) whether it should be facilitated by LGIU and, if possible, involve representatives of other Councils.

C Overend reported on information received from officers at Eastbourne BC since agenda publication. He reported that Eastbourne moved to whole council elections in 2001. He reported feedback received from officers at that Council on the practicalities of this change. He advised that:

- The Authority comprised two main parties - 28 Members – so finding candidates for elections was not a problem;
- change involved a lot of hard work;
- the Parliamentary constituency was a marginal seat with 3 Member wards for the local elections and coterminous boundaries with Parishes;
- Local elections tended to be fought on national issues;
- change generated some initial cost savings;
- still have annual Councils;
- overall it was a worthwhile move.

It was suggested that Members might wish to meet Members from other Councils to discuss experiences of moving to whole Council election to get a feel for what it involved.

The Panel discussed the merits of proposals.

Some felt that a move to whole council elections should:

- allow for a greater understanding of the electoral process amongst the public, there was confusion amongst residents during the run up to an election about whether a poll was due to be held in their ward.
- encourage voter turnout;
- provide the Council with long term stability and enhance its ability to plan long term;
- create cost savings

A whole Council election was held in 2002. Details of the turnout for that election should be provided for information.

More frequent elections should also provide further opportunities for Members to canvass their voters and get a feel for 'opinion on the street'.

It was also felt that no new arguments in favour of the change had come to light since the last review of the case in 2001. In view of this some saw no reason to go against the findings of that review which opposed the change. It was felt that changing the frequency of local elections was not a priority for the District or residents. It would also allow for the election of many new members with limited experience which could create problems.

There was also concern about whether the Political Groups would have the ability to find enough candidates for Whole Council Elections

In sum, the Panel concluded that the arguments against the whole elections outweighed the benefits. In view of this they proposed that the option should not be taken up.

Agreed a report be submitted to the 31 January 2008 OSC and Full Council recommending that the option for this Council to adopt whole Council elections be not taken up.

Agreed that an item be put in the next Council Bulletin to give Members a further opportunity to submit feedback.

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

Noted that there were no reports to be made.

8. FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on 15 January 2008 at **7.30** p.m in CR1.