

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 6 November 2008

Subject: Consultation: Communities in Control

Officer contact for further information: C Overend

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry



Recommendation:

That the committee address and comment on the questions listed in the report to enable the Council to respond to the Government Consultation.

Report

1. The Government White Paper 'Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power' published in July 2008 set out a range of policies with a view to returning power to local communities. It has agreed a series of consultation papers covering the following aspects:

Improving Local Accountability;
Making and Enforcing Byelaws;
A Revised Code of Conduct for Members;
Mayors;
Time-off Entitlements; and
Local Government Publicity.

2. The first of these consultation papers has been published, copies of which are available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/localaccountability>

3. The paper covers the development and strengthening of Overview and Scrutiny, new powers to hold local officers to account and facilitating the work of Councillors. The paper is being considered at this meeting to determine the Council's response.

4. The focus of the paper is on ways of improving the participation of local people in decisions and decision-making and to facilitate the work of councillors in representing their communities.

5. Specific Areas for which comments are sought are:

a) Developing and strengthening Overview and Scrutiny through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health 2007 Act particularly in relation to the LAA and the delivery of LAA improvement targets.

b) Do you agree with the concept of being able to require information from partner authorities/organisations?

c) Which information in published scrutiny reports and recommendations should be exempt or confidential?

d) Do you agree with the idea of joint County and District Overview and Scrutiny Committees? Should these be 'Task and Finish' or cover issues on an ongoing basis? If so, which issues? What issues would need to be considered as part of any such arrangements?

- e) Do you agree with the proposal to enable District Scrutiny Committees to review the delivery of LAA targets?
- f) How could the visibility of the scrutiny function be increased?
- g) How might the visibility and accountability of local public officers be increased so that they are all open to public scrutiny? E.g. should the Chairman and Chief Executives of local bodies attend regular public hearings? Should there be a right for local people to petition to hold officers to account?
- h) Could anything be done to assist the work of Councillors by modernising the way they do business to enable them to use information and communications technology to participate in meetings and vote remotely?
- i) Should appeals in respect of a local authority's response to a petition be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee? What practical issues might arise?
- j) Should the scope of the scheme be agreed locally by the various partners? Would this be an effective means of empowering Communities?
- k) Do you agree with the proposal to allow authorities to modify their attendance and voting procedures to allow 'remote' viewing?

Other means of responding

6. If you have any comments to make on the consultation paper please advise Chris Overend on 01992 564247 in advance of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. As an alternative, should you wish to comment as an individual you can do so via e-mail (localaccountability@communities.qsi.gov.uk) or in writing to Local Accountability Consultation, Communities and Local Government, Zone 5/A2, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU.

7. All members had been consulted about this in the Members Bulletin, dated 24 October 2008.