

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 29 January 2009

Portfolio Holder: Leader

Report of: Constitution and Member Services SSP

Subject: Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 - Executive Constitution

Officer contact for further information: I Willett (01992 564243)

Democratic Services Officer: I Willett (01992 564243)



SCRUTINY



Epping Forest District Council

Recommendations:

(1) That a report be submitted to the Council recommending as follows:

(a) that the proposed amendments to the following parts of the Constitution be approved:

Article 3 (Citizens and the Council)	(Appendix 1)
Article 4 (The Full Council)	(Appendix 2)
Article 7 (The Executive)	(Appendix 3)
Council Procedure Rules	(Appendix 4)
Executive Procedure Rules	(Appendix 5)
Scheme of Delegation	(Appendix 6)

(b) that the following schedules which have been compiled by separating those matters which are to be approved by the Leader of Council and those to be determined by the Council be noted:

Delegation to Officers

Appendix 7 - Leader Approval
Appendix 8 - Council Approval

Outside Bodies

Appendix 9 - Leader Approval
Appendix 10 - Council Approval

(c) that the Council's public statement regarding this review of the Council's executive arrangements as set out in Appendix 11 be approved;

(d) that the deadline for submission of questions by Councillors be amended to "seven days" from "seven working days" in Council Procedure Rule 10.3 (Appendix 4);

(e) that the re-allocation of the Local Councils' Liaison Committee to Appendix 10 be agreed and consideration be given to a similar re-allocation of Victoria County History of Essex and the West Essex Area Forum;

(f) that the proposed changes to the Constitution be approved and authority for other minor and consequential amendments be delegated to the Assistant to the Chief Executive; and

(2) That, the views of the Cabinet on this report be submitted to this meeting prior to this report being submitted to the Council.

(NOTE: The Cabinet at its meeting on 15 December 2008 noted the proposed changes to the executive constitution set out in this report. The Cabinet also supported the proposal that the Local Councils' Liaison Committee, the Victoria County History Association and the West Essex Area Forum should be outside bodies to which appointments are made by the Council rather than the Cabinet.)

Report:

1. The 2007 Act makes a number of changes to the operation of local authority executives and in particular the powers of the Leader of the Council.
2. Previously the Council had a choice between three types of executive but the new Act has reduced this by one to the following options:
 - (a) Elected Mayor and Cabinet; or
 - (b) Leader and Cabinet.
3. This Council has been operating (b) since 2000 but on a different basis from the one which the 2007 Act provides. The Council's Leader and Cabinet Executive is the optional "Weak Leader" model with appointments of the Leader, Deputy and portfolio holders etc made by the Council. Likewise, the number and duties of portfolios, delegation to officers and appointments to outside organisations are not dealt with by the Leader but by the Council.
4. The 2007 Act ends the "Weak Leader" executive and requires the Council to move to the "Strong Leader" model. This means that the various functions summarised in Paragraph 3 are now the sole responsibility of the Leader of the Council. However the Council retains responsibility for non-executive functions and the governance arrangements, which apply to them.
5. Main Changes Summarised
 - (a) the Leader of Council is appointed by the Council at its Annual meeting;
 - (b) if not appointed at the Annual meeting, the Council must make the appointment at its next available meeting;
 - (c) a Leader's term of office starts on the date of election into that role and ceases at the conclusion of his/her term of office as a Councillor unless:
 - (i) the Leader resigns.
 - (ii) the Leader becomes disqualified.
 - (iii) the Leader is removed from office by a majority vote in the Council.
 - (iv) the Leader becomes incapacitated.
 - (d) the Leader may only be removed from office on the grounds mentioned in (c) above or by reason of regulations which have yet to be made by Parliament;

- (e) the Leader's term of office runs until his/her term of office as a Councillor ends but the 2007 Act extends this by a few weeks to the next Annual Council meeting and for that reason, his/her term of office as a Councillor is extended by the same period.
- (f) Section 63 of the 2007 Act makes the Leader of the Council responsible for discharge of all executive functions.

Previous Council Discussions

6. At the Council meeting on 22 April 2008 (Minute 121(b)), the Council resolved:
 - (a) to continue with the Leader and Cabinet executive;
 - (b) to reject the option of a Mayor and Cabinet executive;
 - (c) to vary the Constitution in accordance with statutory requirements;
 - (d) to consider a public statement regarding the Council's decision, set a timetable for implementation and describe any interim arrangements;
 - (e) to retain the provision for the Leader to be removed from office by a majority vote in the Council.

Next Steps

7. We have considered the requirement for the Council to amend its Constitution to accord with the 2007 Act. The following documents are therefore submitted for review:

- ... (a) Article 3 (Citizens and the Council) - Appendix 1.
- ... (b) Article 4 (The Full Council) - Appendix 2.
- ... (c) Article 7 (The Executive) - Appendix 3.
- ... (d) Council Procedure Rules - Appendix 4.
- ... (e) Executive Procedure Rules - Appendix 5.
- ... (f) Scheme of Delegation - Appendix 6.

8. These documents show the existing wording and proposed changes to comply with the 2007 Act.

Delegation to Officers

- ... 9. In addition, there are two Appendices (7 and 8) relating to the Schedule of Delegation to Officers. Appendix 7 indicates those delegations which are to be approved by the Leader because they relate to executive services. Appendix 8 shows the remaining delegations which are to be approved by the Council.
- 10. These appendices represent a subdivision of the existing schedule. The criterion for the executive list is that the delegations relate to services. For the Council/Regulatory list those delegations which relate to corporate governance and non-Cabinet services have been included.
- 11. During our review of Appendices 9 and 10, we discussed the list of organisations from the point of view of determining which of the following bodies should be in the Leader

List (Appendix 9) and which in the Council List (Appendix 10):

- (a) Local Council's Liaison Committee (5 representatives). This body was listed under Appendix 7 but two of the appointments are of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council whilst another a third representative is the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The two remaining places are occupied by a Cabinet member and a past Chairman of the Council.

We feel that these five seats should be allocated by the Council as they are not strictly related to Cabinet functions; the Committee is, in any event, not a decision making body.

- (b) Victoria County History of Essex (1 representative)

We queried why this body is included in the Cabinet List. The organisation is distantly related to a Cabinet Portfolio (Leisure) but feel that it is not in the "executive" category, there may be a case for transferring it to the Council List. Currently, this is an officer appointment. We would ask the Committee to review the matter.

- (c) West Essex Area Forum (1 representative)

This body is run by Essex County Council and the Council can nominate one representative. Currently this is the Leader of the Council and the body is included in the "executive" category. We discussed whether this really needed to be a Leader (Appendix 9) appointment, as any Councillor can attend what is a public meeting.

We leave the Committee to determine the best listing for this body.

Outside Organisations

- ... 12. Two further Appendices (9 and 10) are submitted in respect of appointments to outside bodies. Appendix 9 are bodies where appointed by the Leader and are the same as those listed in the category "Executive" in the existing schedule. Appendix 10 shows those which are proposed to remain with the Council.
13. Later this year, the Panel will be conducting the annual review of the list. For the purpose of this report only the headings have been provided.
14. During our review of Council Procedure Rules, our attention was drawn to an anomaly relating to the period of notice for submission of questions by the public (Rule 9.3) and Councillors (Rule 10.3). Under Rule 9.3 the period of notice is 7 days before the Council meeting but in Rule 10.3, the deadline is seven working days. We feel that the notice period should be "seven days" for both types of question. Appendix 4 shows the relevant wording to effect the change.

Notes on Delegation to Officers and Outside Organisations

15. It is worth bearing in mind that all the Panel is being asked to do is to recommend how the two lists are to be configured, not actual appointments.
16. Outside organisations are subject to a pro rata division between political groups, although the executive local and ex-officio categories are excluded from that calculation.

Action which the Council must take

17. Although some government regulations have yet to be published, we feel that the changes needed to the Constitution are clear. The Act requires the Council to publish a statement indicating:
 - (a) the Council's decision on the form of executive and the reasons for this decision;
 - (b) the changes to the Leader and Cabinet Executive which are now proposed;
 - (c) the timescale for introducing the changes;
 - (d) any interim arrangements which will operate.
- ... 18. A draft statement is set out in Appendix 11 for consideration by the Committee. Once approved by the Council, we suggest that this be published:
 - (a) on the website;
 - (b) in The Forester;
 - (c) by means of press releases.