

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 5 JANUARY 2006  
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING  
AT 7.30 - 9.40 PM**

<b>Members Present:</b>	R Morgan (Chairman), R D'Souza, Mrs J Davis, Mrs P Richardson, D Stallan, Mrs J H Whitehouse and J M Whitehouse
<b>Other members present:</b>	(none)
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Mrs P Brooks and Mrs A Haigh
<b>Officers Present</b>	I Willett (Head of Research and Democratic Services), A Scott (Head of Information, Communications and Technology), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer), W MacLeod (Elections Officer) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

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

It was noted that Councillor J M Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor Mrs A Haigh and Councillor Mrs J H Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor Mrs P Brooks.

**11. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

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

**12. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 3 NOVEMBER 2005**

Noted.

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

The Head of Research and Democratic Services outlined the current position regarding the work plan which was noted by the Panel.

**14. COUNCIL MEETINGS - REVIEW OF FUTURE ROLE**

The Policy and Research Officer reminded Members that at its last meeting the Panel explored a number of options for enhancing debate at Council meetings. The Panel agreed that visits be undertaken to Council meetings which applied the identified options to see how they worked in practice. The visits had now been completed and had explored:

- Presentations from external organisations with specific recommendations
- State of the District Debates
- 'Council in Committee' model for single issues Council meetings, debates about particular areas in the District
- Verbal unannounced questions on topical issues

- OSC Chairman and Portfolio Holder reports on current work followed by questions without notice
- The submission and consideration of strategic documents at an early stage – ‘First and second reading idea’
- Different arrangements/procedures for questions by the public

It was suggested that the arrangements for receiving external attendees be looked to ensure they were clear.

In considering whether any existing items could be deleted to free up time for new items, Members considered whether the Chairman’s announcements and the presentation of awards should remain standard items or whether they could be dealt with elsewhere. A member suggested that only Cabinet reports effecting the policy and budgetary framework should be submitted to the Council for consideration.

The Head of ICT reported that as part of the e-government priority setting initiative, a forum might be established to allow the public to submit comments and questions. This could support any proposals.

The Policy and Research Officer undertook to investigate the proposals in depth and elucidate where appropriate with example from practices elsewhere. This would include the merits of each potential change and would be presented to the next meeting so that decisions could be made.

Agreed that all Members should be canvassed to ascertain their views on which options should be taken forward. Proposed that this be undertaken through a special edition of the Members Bulletin. Proposed that a Member champion be sought to consult each group to raise awareness and support as per the OS review which was essential for any proposals.

**ACTION:**

The Policy and Research Officer to prepare summary report for next meeting.

**15. MEMBER SERVICES - DRAFT GUIDANCE FROM STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Head of Research and Democratic Services presented the report. It was noted that the draft guidance had been sent out through the Members Bulletin and no adverse comments had been received.

Members raised a number of points. It was agreed that:

- Wording be added to the section on Correspondence to state that electronic versions be made available.
- Line ‘approval should be obtained at Member Level’ in paragraph 4.4 be clarified
- Last sentence in paragraph 4.6 be reworded for clarity’s sake
- Paragraph 4.7 be expanded to referred to Members rights in relation to surgeries

- Wording be added to paragraph 5.5 to consider whether arrangements should be implemented to allow Members to use the Council's photocopiers for personal or political purposes.
- Paragraph 7.7 be amended to state the consequences associated with non attendance of compulsory training courses.

Attention was paid to paragraph 6 on Advice. Agreed that paragraph 6.1 include the wording '..where confidentiality is requested by Members this be respected'. It was agreed that this should go on to say...'Officers will advise on when such information must be shared'. The Head of Research and Democratic Services undertook to ascertain whether the information was already covered elsewhere and if so to take the section out to avoid duplication and ensure that the advise was held in one document.

Agreed that the paragraph 8.1 and 8.2 under the subheading freedom of information requirements be removed and instead advise recipients of requests to see officers for advise.

Agreed that the words 'regular basis' be substituted with the 'as and when required' in paragraph 9.1.

**ACTION:**

The Head of Research and Democratic Services to amend report as indicated.

**16. MEMBERS SERVICES - POLICY**

The Panel were asked whether they wished to carry out a review of services for members and if supported to consider how such a review should be carried out.

A request for the OS programme had been submitted earlier on in the year by Councillor Mrs Whitehouse. The Councillor was in attendance and explained that her request sought the establishment of a forum to consider housekeeping matters in relation to Member Services. She proposed that the review ought to be carried out outside the OS process. It was agreed that the matter be referred to the next Group Leaders meeting for further consideration.

**RESOLVED:**

That the request for a review of Members Services be submitted to the next meeting of the Group Leaders for consideration.

**17. ELECTORAL PILOTS**

The Head of Research and Democratic Services gave a progress report on the Council's application for electoral pilots. The bid comprised electronic counting, postal vote verification/ tracking and pre – election publications. Nationwide, approximately 30 applications had been submitted.

The Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA) had yet to report their response to the application which was expected on 15 December 2005. Noted that recent developments indicated that the available budget was tighter than expected which could reduce the number of successful bids. In addition, the decision to omit non

geographical voting (i.e. travelling polling stations) could have implications for the success of the application, as the scheme was favoured by the government. Should the pilot be successful, any supplementary costs would be met by the DCA.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress report on the Council's application for electronic electoral pilots be noted.

**18. ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION BILL**

The Panel received and considered a report on the progress of the Electoral Administration Bill through Parliament. The main features of the Bill aimed to improve access, promote participation and security and improve administrative effectiveness. These aspects were covered in the attached fact sheet.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report on the progress of the Electoral Administration Bill through Parliament be noted.

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

There were no reports to be made to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 February 2006.

**20. FUTURE MEETINGS**

7:30 p.m 20 February 2006