

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERS SERVICES SCRUTINY
STANDING PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 6 JUNE 2006
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1
AT 7.30 - 9.25 PM**

Members Present:	R Morgan (Chairman), M Cohen, Mrs P Brooks, R Church, J Demetriou, Mrs A Haigh, J Markham, Mrs P Richardson and Mrs P Smith
Other members present:	M Colling, Mrs D Collins, P McMillan, D Stallan and Mrs J H Whitehouse
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs L Wagland
Officers Present	I Willett (Head of Research and Democratic Services), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer), A Sebbinger (Senior Planning Officer), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

1. CONFIRMATION OF MEMBERS, CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN.

Councillor R Morgan was confirmed Chairman of the Panel and Councillor M Cohen as Vice – Chairman.

2. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 27 MARCH 2006

Agreed subject to the first sentence of Note 38 (d) (Future Role of Council – Reports from Cabinet/ Overview and Scrutiny) being reworded to state that this would involve Portfolio Holders submitting a written report on current work to every meeting and provide Members with the opportunity to ask verbal questions without notice on any issue under the Portfolio Holders remit.

The Policy and Research Officer advised that any decisions on the review would be forwarded in a separate report to be considered later on in this agenda during which Members would be able to make further comments and amendments.

3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

No substitute Members were reported.

4. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel ascribed reporting timescales to the items. **Agreed** that a meeting be arranged for 3 July 2006 to start the review of Civic issues (item 9) and that it was a high priority. **Agreed** that Portfolio Holders be invited to input into the review of Cabinet arrangements. **Agreed** that the report to be submitted on support for complaints against Councillors cover cases made over say the last 3-4 years.

ACTION:

Democratic Services to update the work programme.

6. AREA PLANS SUB - COMMITTEES - REVIEW OF STRUCTURE

The Panel gave further consideration to the structure of the Area Planning Sub – Committees.

Noted the three principles previously agreed by the Panel that any proposals should ensure all Members have the opportunity to serve on a Sub – Committee, have regard to the differing needs of the rural and urban areas and balance the work loads between the Sub – Committee better.

Noted the responses submitted to the consultation carried out following the discussion at the last meeting.

The Head of Research and Democratic Services referred to Best Value targets set by government. He reported the view that a three weekly cycle might help the Council in achieving the targets and as a result raise the level of Planning and Development Grant received from central government. The Panel now needed to determine whether this structure should be recommended and the areas to be covered and Membership principles for any proposals to fit the agreed three aims.

A Sebbinger reported on planning performance indicating that there was a shortfall in performance for cases determined at Sub – Committee. He undertook to provide information detailing the percentage of applications submitted to Sub – Committee and their success in meeting the performance targets. Noted the possibility of changing the delegation function to speed the process up.

A Sebbinger drew attention to a report of Planning Services on current obstacles and the benefits to be gained from a three cycle structure. Noted that this option might increase officer workload.

Stressed the importance of ensuring Local Councils were aware of deadlines for making representations.

Agreed to support in principle a three week cycle to facilitate Best Value Performance.

In relation to Membership considered whether the Sub – Committees should continued to be split into geographical areas and restricted to only those Members from the wards concerned. Considered whether this restriction should be removed to allow Sub – Committees to consider applications from any area on the basis of urgency to speed up decision making and allow the appointment of substitutes from any ward. Several Members support this. Members also stressed the importance of the geographical link on the grounds of it ensured cases were dealt with by Members with local knowledge.

Agreed that the issues be raised at the next meeting of the Local Liaison Committee to canvass the views of Local Councils.

Agreed that the principles agreed by the Panel and issues raised be sent out for further consultation to Members.

Agreed that comments be sought through the website.

7. COUNCIL MEETINGS - REVIEW OF FUTURE ROLE

The Policy and Research Officer reported on responses received to the consultation recently undertaken to canvass the views of Members on the options under consideration.

In conjunction with this the Panel considered each option.

(a) State of the District Debates.

Agreed that this option be recommended for adoption.

(b) 'Single Issue' Debates

Agreed that this option be recommended for adoption.

(c) Progress Reports from Overview and Scrutiny/Leader/Portfolio Holders/

(d) Questions by Members – new provision

Noted that this would involve the above being required to submit a brief written report to every meeting and would provide Members the opportunity to ask verbal questions without notice on the written submissions or on wider issues under their remit. Emphasis should be placed on this latter aspect. Agreed that the standard item for written question should be retained. Agreed that a time limit be ascribed to each item to prevent discussion free ranging and rules should be made for this to assist the Chairmanship of the debate.

Agreed that this option be recommended for adoption.

(e) Questions by the Public – Increased Publicity

Stated that the lay out of the Council Chamber needed to be rearranged to enable the public to sit with the Members.

Agreed that this proposal be recommended for adoption.

Policy and Research Officer to draft report forwarding principles agreed by the Panel and a terms of reference to reflect the changes. **Agreed** that this be sent out to all Members for further comments and then submitted directly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee if no adverse comments were received from the exercise. **Agreed** that should any adverse comments be made to the consultation the Panel would be able to call back the report for further consideration prior to submission to the OSC.

ACTION

Policy and Research Officer to draft report terms of reference for further consultation and subject to no adverse comments being made consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

Final report on Future Role of Council.

9. FUTURE MEETINGS

Agreed that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on 3 July 2006 at 7.30 p.m in CR1 and then on

7 August 2006
10 October 2006
4 December 2006
8 February 2007
2 April 2007