

OVERVIEW COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

3rd April 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Bell (Chair) and Councillors Harrington and Routledge.

Conservative Group

Councillors Bladen and Mrs. Robbins.

Invited Members

Councillor Brooks (Chair of Development Control Committee), Councillor Carroll (Deputy Leader of the Council), Councillor Lemmon (Leader of the Conservative Group) and Councillor Southern (Chair of Community Services Committee).

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Southerd, who had been invited in his capacity as Chair of the Environmental Services Committee.

OV/30. **REVIEW OF THE NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURE**

Members received a presentation from Clive Mitchell of District Audit on the implementation of the Council's new political structure. This matter would be the subject of a detailed report shortly, which was currently at the draft stage.

Members considered various aspects of the new political structure, including practical arrangements, the number of Meetings and the size of Committees. It was felt that the frequency of Meetings and the compositions of Committees were reasonable and current staff resources permitted the appropriate servicing of the process. However, the Council had been unfortunate to lose the services of Jonathan Eatough, the Legal and Members' Services Manager, at this particular time and this would create additional workloads and responsibilities on existing staff for a considerable period until a replacement had been appointed.

The Chief Executive referred to the level of modernising which had already been undertaken in relation to the previous Committee structure prior to July 2001. However, it was considered that there was potential to improve the decision making process further under a Delegation Scheme, as raised in the presentation by District Audit. Councillor Brooks referred to the Delegation Scheme in operation for the development control service and raised concern as to whether such a delegation system could be applied to the other policy committees without the definition of clear policy framework. The Chief Executive advised that there was a need to incorporate the implications of the Corporate Plan into any Delegation Scheme and this issue would now be progressed accordingly.

In response to a query relating to public participation in the development control process, it was reported that this matter was covered in the

Development Control Best Value Implementation Plan. However, the practicalities of the issue were very complex and consideration of this matter was ongoing. Arising from this matter, Members also discussed public participation at other Meetings.

Members considered a report of the Management Team on the new political structure, which made the following recommendations:-

- Consult staff and Members and make any minor amendments to the Constitution that would smooth the working of the Council.
- Review the working of full Council to try to eliminate any redundant bureaucracy, open up debate on current issues and provide more information to all Members on key issues facing the Council.
- Review the working of policy committees to eliminate routine matters that could be delegated to Officers and devote more time to policy development and performance monitoring.
- Implement a delegation agreement, which is transparent to Members, and, where appropriate, will allow decisions to be scrutinised.
- Ensure that staff resources for Scrutiny are in balance with the work programme and Members' expectations. The work of Scrutiny should support the Corporate Plan.
- Review the working of Area Meetings so that they can work more co-operatively with the County Council, represent and lobby for their community.
- Ensure the final constitution is promoted and widely understood by Members and employees.
- The Council should develop to engage the community, particularly hard to reach groups and the disaffected.
- Ensure the Standards Committee looks to be a visible presence in promoting high levels of probity in Parish Councils and in this Council in particular.

With regard to Area Meetings, it was felt that these operated well, particularly when a Meeting was issue-based. However, it was noted that many matters raised were the responsibility of the County Council and accordingly, it was suggested that a formal arrangement with the County Council should be considered to secure additional officer representation from the County Council at Area Meetings.

With regard to the scrutiny function, the Chair considered that at the present time, there were shortcomings in the call-in process which would need to be revisited.

Members felt that the report submitted by the Management Team should be considered by all Members of the Council prior to any firm recommendations and this would be distributed accordingly.

Due to the current limited resources in the Legal Section, the Chief Executive advised that he was currently in the process of securing the services of the County Council, as necessary, for advice on any constitutional matters and it was noted that any amendments to the Constitution would require the approval of the Council.

With regard to community leadership, a Member considered that several Members appeared unsure about how this affected their role and it was

suggested that the recent Local Government White Paper on the matter may be an appropriate issue for consideration at a future Council Meeting. Members considered the merits of holding Committee Meetings throughout the District in an attempt to increase public involvement.

Members expressed their thanks to Clive Mitchell of District Audit for his presentation and it was noted that his final report would be available shortly. It would be necessary to arrange a further Meeting of the Committee in due course to formulate any recommendations to the Council.

RESOLVED:-

That the recommendations set out in the report of the Management Team be approved in principle together with the points outlined below and the matter be considered at a further Meeting of the Committee in due course:-

- (a) The number and size of Committees together with the frequency of Meetings is acceptable.***
- (b) The composition of agendas for policy committees be reviewed.***
- (c) The terms of reference for policy committees be reviewed to resolve any overlapping issues.***
- (d) Policy framework/guidelines be strengthened to support delegation arrangements.***
- (e) The feasibility of allowing members of the public to speak at Meetings be investigated.***
- (f) The call-in arrangements be reviewed together with feedback to policy committees following any call-in.***
- (g) The possibility of combining County and District Area Meetings be explored.***
- (h) New ways of involving local people in the work of their Council be explored.***
- (i) The feasibility of holding Committee Meetings throughout the District be investigated.***
- (j) The review of the political management arrangements be linked to the Council's community leadership role.***

R. L. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 4.45 p.m.