

OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

20th September 2004

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Harrington (Chair) and Councillors Bambrick and Murphy.

Conservative Group

Councillor Hood (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Bale and Martin.

(Councillor Stone also attended the Meeting.)

OV/15. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th August 2004 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

OV/16. **PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES**

At the previous Overview Committee Meeting held on 9th August 2004, it was reported that the Council's Constitution currently required Policy Committees to respond to proposals from Overview or a Scrutiny Committee within a period of six months. Following discussion it was felt that a period of three months would be more appropriate, although the need for flexibility was recognised. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that a report would be provided to Full Council, in November 2004, detailing required changes to rules, giving reasons as to why these changes were necessary. Following Council approval, the Constitution would be updated to reflect the changes and this would have immediate effect.

OV/17. **ROLE OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL**

It was reported that this subject had been discussed at length at the previous Overview Committee Meeting. A formal request for a Scrutiny Review of the role of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council had since been made, which detailed all relevant issues. The reasons given which substantiated the request for a Scrutiny Review were as follows:-

- The Independent Remuneration Panel had increased substantially the basic allowance and special responsibility allowance for Members. However, there had been no review of the allowances for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council which were paid under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972.
- The Civic Car, which was purchased in August 2001 was nearing the end of its expected life and an alternative needed to be considered within the next six months.
- There was a need to update the Civic Guidance Manual. This provided a clear opportunity to consider the role of the Chair and Vice-Chair, priorities, aims and objectives before a new manual was produced.

- Promotion and support of the Chair needed to be considered.
- Budget considerations needed to be addressed, particularly for “one-off” events.

The Chair requested comments from Members with regard to these issues and a full discussion ensued.

Councillor Bale, Chair of the Council in 2003/04, felt that there was insufficient input into business promotion. Most of the events attended by the Chair of the Council were social functions within the District and although these events were considered to be important it was felt that there should be a business objective to target various bodies in order to generate business and promote the District. However, at the same time, the integrity of the Chair must be retained. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration stated that she would be pursuing business links both within and outside of the District as part of her remit. The Chair commented that clear guidelines were required detailing what was expected from the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council and that guidance should be provided in order to meet these expectations.

It was agreed that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services would provide for the next Meeting, an updated version of the section on the Role of the Chair, for inclusion in a revised Civic Guidance Manual. Officers were also requested to provide details of events that the Chair of the Council had attended over the previous three years, with particular regard to the split between business and social events.

With a view to both a justification for the provision of a Civic car and to allow consideration of available options, Officers were asked to provide details of car usage, mileage and times of use.

In conclusion, it was agreed to invite Councillor Mrs. Mead, Chair of the Council, the Administrative Assistant (Civic Functions) and the Chauffeur to the next Meeting.

OV/18. **MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (SCRUTINY COMMITTEES)**

It was reported that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services held the budget for Members’ training and development and that liaison between the Officer and representatives from both political groups determined Members’ training needs. Successful training sessions had already taken place which addressed the issues of planning, licensing and equalities and diversities.

A discussion took place with regard to the provision of specific training for Members of Scrutiny Committees. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the Training and Development Officer could provide training by way of “workshops” which could target these needs. Councillor Murphy felt that Members should receive training that provided skills which would enable them to perform the Scrutiny function to the best of their ability. He commented that external training (with external recognition) would be more beneficial to the Members than internal workshops. The Chair agreed that training for Scrutiny and Overview Committee Members was of the utmost importance, but recognised that some Members would have concerns with regard to external training. It was also noted that

external training would have a greater cost than internal workshops and that the current training budget would be inadequate. Councillor Martin felt that there was a need to provide accessible training to all Members with regard to fulfilling their role as a District Councillor.

It was agreed that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services would arrange for workshop training to be provided, covering the areas of problem solving, interview skills, performance management and project management. The Officer would then liaise with the representatives from both political groups in order to assess ongoing training needs and training budget requirements.

OV/19. **REPORTS TO POLICY COMMITTEES**

The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration confirmed that there were currently three reports to be presented to Council or Policy Committees. A report on Car Parking was to be presented to Environmental and Development Services Committee, a report on Sheltered Housing was to be presented to the Housing Services Committee and a report detailing the Changes to Overview and Scrutiny Procedure was to be presented to Full Council.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.20 p.m.