

CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP 27 FEBRUARY 2003

Item 3 – CTG7 – Standards Committee membership

- 1 At its last meeting, the Task Group discussed the basis on which the Council should appoint its own representatives to its Standards Committee, with particular reference to whether it is appropriate for Group Leaders to be appointed. After considering a number of options, the Task Group decided to discuss further the following three:
 - a one member from each political group, as now.
 - b as now, but excluding Group Leaders.
 - c entirely at the discretion of the Council.

Standards Board Guidance

- 2 Part of the Standards Board's guidance on the make-up of the standards committee says that standards committees do not have to reflect the political balance of the council because the standards committee is above party politics and its representatives need to gain the respect of the whole council, regardless of their political party. The guidance goes on to say "Indeed, it may be appropriate to have an equal number of representatives from all parties represented on the council". The Board believes it is very important "that your standards committee includes representatives who have the support of all political parties."
- 3 When the issue of the appropriateness of appointing Group Leaders to the Standards was first raised, the officers sought advice and were informed that this was a matter for individual authorities. It has recently been confirmed that this remains the view of the Standards Board.
- 4 In relation to councils operating executive arrangements, the guidance sets out the statutory provisions whereby no mayor or leader, and only one member of the executive, may sit on the standards committee. It adds, however, that the committee does not need to include a member of the executive. It also says "You should consider whether it is appropriate to appoint an executive member in order to show that the committee is supported and respected by all parts of the council, or whether not having an executive member reflects a degree of independence from the political leadership of the council."
- 5 As indicated at the last meeting, this might suggest that, in a modified committee system, the Leader of the Council should not serve on the standards committee, and only one committee chairman.
- 6 Nothing has come to light to help the Task Group reach a view on the Group Leader issue. For the rest, the Council's current practice fits in

well with the guidance. The Committee includes one member of each of the four political groups represented on the Council (see paragraph 2 above); the Leader of the Council does not serve on the Committee; and only one Committee Chairman serves on it.

A Way Forward

- 7 In the light of the Standards Board's guidance, the Task Group may feel that the Council's current practice of appointing one representative from each political group to the Standards Committee should continue.
- 8 It remains to be considered whether each political group should nominate its representative or whether it would be preferable for the Council to make the appointments without any input from the group machinery. The former method would be the easier to manage. However, it does not automatically follow (though it is to be hoped that it would) that the respect of a political group for its nominee to the Committee would necessarily be shared by the members of other political groups.
- 9 If the thinking in paragraph 8 were accepted, it would be preferable for the Council to choose its Standards Committee without any input from the party machinery. This might be a rather cumbersome process. It could, perhaps, be managed by inviting all members willing to serve on the Committee to put their names forward in advance of the Annual Meeting. The Council would then be asked to appoint one representative of each group from the resulting list. This approach would have the disadvantage that some members who would have the support of the Council might not put themselves forward. The process would, however, be clearly distinct from the political appointments to other Committees.
- 10 With regard to the issue of Group leaders serving on the Committee, the question remains of whether the Task Group inclines to the view that Group Leaders, by definition, command the respect of their colleagues and that it is, therefore, appropriate for them to serve on the committee; or whether the appointment of Group Leaders would be seen as potentially adding an undesirably political aspect to the process.
- 11 Unless the Task Group can reach a clear consensus on this point, or feels strongly enough to go to a vote on it, it may wish to leave this as an open issue for the Council to decide.