

Committee: CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP
Date: 24 MARCH 2003
Agenda Item No: 4
Title: COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP
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- 1 The Task Group is asked to consider whether it wishes to recommend any changes to the Committee Structure. In the light of the Licensing Bill now going through Parliament, and of the discussion at the Task Group's last meeting, a separate item appears elsewhere on the agenda recommending the establishment of a dedicated Licensing Committee. This paper raises other items which the Group may wish to consider.

Policy Committees

- 2 The current structure allocates functions to policy committees in logical groups. It has also dispensed with sub-committees in an attempt to both clarify and speed up the Council's decision making process. However, at present there is an imbalance in the workloads of the various committees. The agendas for the Resources and Environment and Transport Committees have tended to be considerably heavier than those for the Community and Leisure and, particularly, the Health and Housing Committee.
- 3 There does not appear to be much scope for easing the workload of the Resources Committee. None of its functions seems appropriate for another committee. It is suggested that one major reason for its heavy workload is that a number of the issues with which it deals have been or are subject to Government initiatives, requiring responses to consultation and/or members deciding what action to take.
- 4 To some extent similar considerations apply to the Environment and Transport Committee. It has had a number of strategic issues to consider recently. It also covers a broad range of issues from the strategic to the local. There may now be merit in re-visiting its workload in the context of that of the other Policy Committees.
- 5 The reason for the light Health and Housing Committee agendas is principally that the functions for which that Committee is responsible tend to be more "regulatory and operational" in nature than those of other Committees and, of necessity, involve a high level of delegation to officers. As above there would appear to be merit in re-visiting the role and functions of the Policy Committees. This could include

redistribution of functions within the existing structure or even a reduction in one Committee!

- 6 The Task Group is requested to consider whether it wishes to recommend any of the above, or any other, proposals to the Council for the new Council to consider.

Stevenage and Uttlesford Audit Partnership Joint Committee

- 7 A joint Internal Audit Partnership with Stevenage Borough Council was established with effect from 1 October 2002 for a trial period of two years. A joint committee model was adopted for the partnership.
- 8 The partnership's terms of reference are as follows

- Approve the Partnership budget and set the daily rate tariff for Audit Staff
- Approve the Partnership Annual Report and Trading Account
- Approve Staff Terms and Conditions (after the initial two year trial period)
- Consider Audit Management Reports on:
 - Staffing
 - Training
 - Sickness
- Consider and approve other business opportunities
- Consider periodic financial reports
- Consider performance information relating to the partnership's work plans
- Consider and approve the Partnership Business/Service Plan
- Consider and approve the Partnership's constitution

Task Groups and Working Parties

- 9 Time or project limited Task Groups have replaced sub-committees and the necessity for retaining them is to be reviewed at the Annual Meeting. Task Groups appointed in 2002 were:

District Grants Advisory Panel
Community Achievement Panel
Leisure (PFI) Board
Saffron Walden Town Centre Traffic Management Scheme
e-Government Task Group
Stansted Airport Referendum Group
Constitution Task Group
Corporate Support Group
Corporate Procurement Group
Representatives on the Local Transportation Panel

- 10 It is considered that all these Task Groups except the last named should continue for the time being. The Local Transportation Panel, however, is now defunct.

Working Parties

- 11 The following Working Parties were appointed in 2002:

Museum Management Joint Working Party
Local Joint Committee
Bridge End Gardens Working Party
Stansted Airport Advisory Panel

- 12 All these Working Parties have a continuing role to play. The Community and Leisure Committee has approved revised Terms of Reference for the Museum Management Joint Working Party, and the Museum Society will have considered them by the time this Task Group meets.

- 13 Now that the Heritage Lottery Fund has approved the Grant for Bridge End Gardens, it is suggested that the terms of Reference of the Working Party should be reviewed to enable it to take action, if necessary, to enable the project to proceed without being subject to delays arising from, e.g., the committee cycle. It would perhaps be wise to change its status to that of a Task Group.

Substitution

- 14 In 1998, the Council considered a possible scheme whereby a member could appoint a substitute to attend on their behalf a meeting he or she could not attend. It was suggested at that time that details of the substitution would have to be made known to officers before the meeting and only one substitution for each political group would be allowed at any one meeting. In the event it was decided not to proceed with this scheme.
- 15 The Task Group is asked to consider whether it wishes to reconsider this matter. It might be appropriate for Environment and Transport, Community and Leisure and Health and Housing Committees only in the first instance. It would not be suitable for regulatory committees, whose business is essentially non-political.