

**CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 25 NOVEMBER 2003**

Present:- Councillor C M Dean – Chairman.  
Councillors E J Godwin, A R Row and A R Thawley.

Officers in attendance:- M J Perry and M T Purkiss.

**CTG1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors V J T Lelliott and P A Wilcock.

**CTG2 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**CTG3 COUNCIL MEETINGS**

At the last Council Meeting the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor R J Copping was referred to the Task Group:-

“that this Council reviews urgently its procedures for the conduct of Council Meetings so as to enable Members to raise issues arising from business conducted by the Council’s Committees between Council Meetings”.

It was also noted that the Chairman of the Council and Group Leaders had met to discuss the perceived need for more Member involvement in the business of the Council. At this meeting, some Members had felt that it was difficult for Councillors to raise issues of concern at Council meetings and a suggestion had been put forward that questions should be allowed to committee chairs without prior notice. It was felt that this would allow an element of informality to enter into the discussions. At this meeting it had generally been agreed that returning to the process of going through the Minute Book would be a retrograde step.

The Task Group then discussed the Notice of Motion and the suggestion put forward from the meeting between the Chairman and Group Leaders. Councillor Row said that he considered that the role of backbenchers had diminished and it was important to improve their involvement. He said that he would favour going through the minutes on a page by page basis. However, the other Members of the Group favoured the suggested question time for Members. If introduced, this would be in addition to the procedure which already existed where Members could raise questions on notice at Full Council meetings under Council Procedure Rule 8.2. Councillor Godwin added that she was concerned at the lack of engagement from some Members and wanted to see Members take some ownership of the Council meeting. She suggested that the question time proposal should be introduced for a trial period covering three Council meetings.

It was then RECOMMENDED that

- 1 For a trial period covering three meetings of the Council, a question time for Members be introduced at Council meetings following the public question time. The period to be of up to 15 minutes duration to enable Members to ask questions of chairs of all main committees, the chair would then reply and the questioner would have the right to come back, but there would be no debate. Questions would not be allowed on individual planning or licensing applications.
- 2 the matter be reviewed following three Council meetings

CTG4

#### **REPRESENTATION ON COMMITTEES**

The Committee and Communications Manager reported that following the last meeting of the Community and Leisure Committee a Member had raised questions concerning the attendance of Museum Society representatives at that meeting. He explained that in May 1975, the Recreation, Amenity and Welfare Committee, which was a predecessor of the Community and Leisure Committee, had decided to ask the Museum Society to nominate three representatives to be co-opted onto the Committee on all future occasions when matters relating to the Museum were discussed. At a later date, it was also agreed to extend invitations to the TIC volunteers and the Community Sports Forum.

In 1992, the work of that committee was delegated to the Amenities Sub-Committee and then in 2001 to the Community and Leisure Committee. At neither time was a decision taken to continue their co-option rights. However, the practice of inviting representatives of the Museum Society and the other organisations to attend continued. The situation was not constitutional and needed to be addressed.

There appeared to be three options:

- (i) regularise the co-option arrangements.
- (ii) extend the rights to other organisations which had a close relationship with the Council
- (iii) enable such organisations to attend any Council committee meeting on an ad-hoc basis at the discretion of the relevant Chairman.

RECOMMENDED that the Council considers extending to stakeholder organisations in the district the right to attend any Council committee meeting on an ad-hoc basis at the discretion of the Chairman.

CTG5

#### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Head of Legal Services reported that, following the establishment of separate Development Control and Licensing Committees, some Members had suggested that there may be a role for a public question time on general and policy issues at the start of the Licensing Committee. A Member had also

suggested that this might be extended to meetings of the Development Control Committee. It was pointed out, however, that under the current delegation scheme the Development Control Committee did not actually make policy, but merely executed it.

RECOMMENDED that the 15 minute public question time be extended to meetings of the Licensing Committee.

CTG6

### **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman asked the Task Group to consider what areas needed to be addressed over the coming months. The Task Group considered that the Work Programme should include the workload of Committees, representation on outside bodies and reporting back from these, a continuous review of Council meetings and giving further consideration to substitution.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm.