

**CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 6.00 pm on 1 JULY 2004**

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

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, S McLagan, M J Perry and M T Purkiss.

**CTG1 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**CTG2 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Council Meetings**

In answer to a question from Councillor C M Dean, the Chief Executive confirmed that the future of Members' question time would be reviewed at the Council Meeting on 20 July 2004.

**CTG3 REVIEW OF DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL**

Councillor Wilcock said that he wanted to keep the meetings of the Task Group informal and hoped that everyone would contribute towards the debate. He said that the Task Group needed to look at how best the Council could deliver a democratic structure which provided speedy and efficient decision making, but enabled all Members to be involved. He suggested that it would be necessary to look at a range of other local authorities and examine the ways in which they organise their democratic process. He said that information could be obtained from the LGA and the IDeA. He had already obtained details from Tyndale Council where there was one policy committee known as the Corporate Policy and Management Board together with a number of regulatory and scrutiny committees.

Councillor Row was concerned that such a structure would greatly reduce the role of 'backbench' Members. Councillor Godwin also expressed concern about the exclusion of other Members in a cabinet style arrangement. Councillor Wilcock said that it was important to ensure that the contribution of all 44 Councillors was maximised. He said that he understood that Kingston Upon Thames Council operated a cabinet system where the accountability of all Members was retained. Officers undertook to obtain further details of this structure. He added that it would be useful to establish some guidelines and parameters for the work of the task group. After some discussion, the following issues were identified:

- Review of the committee system against other forms of decision making
- Review what the Council currently does and look at a structure which reflects the officer structure.
- Establish a customer focused structure which enables the speedy delivery of quality decisions.
- Examine whether best use is being made of Full Council.
- Review the role of Scrutiny and Overview and examine whether there is a need to split policy development and scrutiny.
- Examine the formal linkage of committees to the executive teams and other committee groupings including area based forums.
- Examine the delegation arrangements
- Examine ways of improving communication throughout the authority
- Examine the balance of the workload between committees
- Look at ways of making the best use of member workshops, task groups and other meetings to assist policy development.
- Review start time of Committee meetings
- Examine the role of Members in encouraging public involvement

During the discussion of these matters some Members expressed concern about the role of the Leadership Liaison Group and stated that whilst it was not a decision making body, it was spending Council money and was seen by some Members as a clique. There was general consensus that there needed to be more openness about this group and its role and membership would be clarified and the Chief Executive would look at ways of informing other Members about the key issues which it considered.

The Task Group were reminded that a Member workshop would be held on Monday 5 July to discuss the issues which had been raised at this meeting. It was suggested that the four main areas for review could be:

- Structures and delivery
- Scrutiny – how do we deliver
- How do we develop policy (overview)
- Member training and role of workshops

#### CTG4

#### **WORK PROGRAMME**

It was agreed that following the workshop the task group would need to review the issues identified earlier in the meeting. It would also be necessary to make contact with other local authorities to discuss alternative structures. It was also felt that the Task Group should meet on a monthly basis, possibly on the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of each month. The next meeting would be held on Thursday 5 August at 6.00 pm in the Chief Executive's office and a list of further dates would be circulated to Members of the Task Group shortly.

#### CTG5

#### **SEMINAR**

It was reported that the Institute of Local Government Studies had organised a seminar on the subject of 'Modernising Full Council – new political

management arrangements and the changing role of full council' which was relevant to the work of the Task Group. The seminar would be held at the University of Birmingham on 15 September 2004 and it was agreed that Councillor Wilcock. The Chairman of the Task Group would be nominated to attend.

The meeting ended at 7.00 pm