

**CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 6.00 pm on 2 SEPTEMBER 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:- S McLagan, M J Perry and M T Purkiss.

**CTG10 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from the Chief Executive. The Chairman extended a welcome to Councillor Row following his recent hip operation.

**CTG11 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 August 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**CTG12 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) CTG8 – Feedback from Members’ Workshop**

Councillor Row said that at the Members’ Workshop there had been no strength of feeling for a cabinet style structure, but he noted from the last set of Minutes that the Chairman had still not ruled out this option. He asked the Chairman to confirm that a cabinet style structure was still not one of his preferred options. He added that the majority of Members did not want to pursue a cabinet or mayoral system and he considered that these options should be ruled out at this stage. Councillor Row also referred to the comments about scrutiny and said that this was a new concept and many Members were finding it difficult to make scrutiny effective.

Councillor Wilcock supported the view that scrutiny was important and had been a difficult concept for many local authorities. He said that one of the aims of any change would be to improve the speed of decision-making and this could be helped by seeing how cabinet systems worked in other authorities and this knowledge would support the work of the Task Group. He also confirmed that whatever solution was finally agreed, it was vital that every member of the Council had a role in the decision making process. Councillor Lelliott added that he would find it helpful to see how scrutiny worked in a cabinet system and to see what lessons could be learnt from this.

Following further discussion the Task Group agreed that, whilst it would be useful to visit an authority with a cabinet style structure, neither a cabinet nor a mayoral system would be appropriate for Uttlesford.

## CTG13 POSSIBLE STRUCTURE AND OPTIONS

The Task Group discussed a number of potential structures and options and highlighted the following areas:-

- A cabinet style system should be ruled out, but it was accepted that some of the procedures used by cabinet style authorities might be useful, particularly in the area of scrutiny.
- A mayoral system was not appropriate for Uttlesford and would isolate most Members.
- There were a number of options to be looked at within a committee style system.
- There was a need to develop training and assess the need for further delegation.
- It was important to make workshops more attractive and focussed on topical issues to encourage better attendance.
- Workshops could be held before meetings of Council and should last no longer than one and a half hours.
- The starting time for committee meetings and workshops needed to be reviewed.
- The role and format of Council meetings also needed to be reassessed.

Councillor Wilcock then asked officers for their views on any other issues which needed to be taken into account. Sarah McLagan mentioned the need for Members to prepare for meetings and read reports in advance so that any questions could be dealt with before meetings commenced. Councillor Godwin said that whilst some Members preferred very full reports, most Members would find it helpful if reports were in a bullet point format or incorporated a slightly more comprehensive executive summary. Sarah McLagan also referred to the chairing of meetings and the need to provide good training. She said that one of the main problems was the repetition of comments at some committee meetings.

Mick Purkiss asked that the following matters be taken into account:-

- Opportunities to make more effective use of delegation should be examined.
- A starting time of 7.00 pm for all committee meetings and workshops would be helpful staff to attending these.
- The role and format of Council should be re-examined and Members should consider whether Council meetings were seen as being the main opportunity for full debate or whether there could be a reduction

in the number of committees and more decisions could be taken at full Council meetings, thereby involving all Members in the decision making process.

- Examine whether there could be an opportunity, prior to Development Control meetings, to deal with some Members questions and points of clarification which might then reduce the time spent at these meetings.

Councillor Wilcock said that the agenda for the next meeting should include items on the issues which the Task Group wanted to examine in their visits to other authorities and an item should also be included on Successful Scrutiny.

#### CTG14 **VISITS TO OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

Mick Purkiss reported that since the last meeting, he had approached a number of local authorities to arrange visits which would enable Members to see a range of different structures.

The following dates had been confirmed:-

Monday 8 November 2004 – South Norfolk  
Thursday 25 November 2004 – Tynedale

He said that no response had yet been received from Watford and it was also intended to approach an Essex authority with a traditional committee system and he had suggested that Maldon would be appropriate. It was also suggested that there might be one or two authorities within the Daventry group which could provide some useful feedback.

It was accepted that it would not be possible for all Members to attend each visit and the Task Group considered that at least two or three Members should be available for each of the visits identified. Mick Purkiss would circulate further details once the necessary arrangements had been made.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm.