

**CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP HELD AT COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN AT 6.00 PM ON 7 OCTOBER 2004**

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

Also present:- Councillor A Dean.

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

CTG15 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the Chief Executive and Councillors C M Dean and A R Row.

CTG16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CTG17 ISSUES TO BE EXAMINED ON VISITS TO OTHER COUNCILS

Mick Purkiss circulated a schedule containing a number of suggested questions which could be asked at the visits to other councils. It was hoped that the responses to the questions would enable the Task Group to make valid comparisons about how the various authorities worked. Members were asked to forward any comments on the suggested questions to Mick Purkiss by no later than 11 October 2004 and it was suggested that a copy of the questions could be forwarded to the councils to be visited in advance.

CTG18 UPDATE ON VISITS TO OTHER COUNCILS

Mick Purkiss circulated the latest details of Members and officers attending the various visits. It was noted that an officer had yet to be identified for the visit to Watford Borough Council.

CTG19 INSTITUTE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDIES – SEMINAR

It was noted that the Institute of Local Government Studies was holding a seminar on 1 December 2004 entitled Modernising Full Council. Councillor Wilcock said that he had attended a similar event at the University of Birmingham and he circulated the handouts which had been made available at that seminar. Members were asked to read these prior to the next meeting to enable a further discussion on the role of Full Council.

CTG20 SUCCESSFUL SCRUTINY

At the last meeting, all Members had received a copy of a document entitled Successful Scrutiny which had been produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The Task Group gave further consideration to this document and discussed how scrutiny was currently operated in Uttlesford. A number of Members felt that the scrutiny function was already covered by the way this Council's committees were politically balanced and it could be argued that much of the work of the scrutiny committees was unnecessary. It was understood that each council was legally obliged to have at least one scrutiny committee but Members felt that it was essential to look at scrutiny in a different way and particularly to develop the scrutiny of outside organisations. It was also considered essential to get to grips with the overview function.

Councillor Wilcock suggested that the Council needed one scrutiny committee focused mainly on external issues with a separate overview committee whose work would include policy development. He referred to the papers from the University of Birmingham concerning Modernising Full Council and, in particular, the suggestion that council should be used for developing and debating policy, concepts and ideas. He said that this would involve all Members in the major decisions affecting the Council.

The Task Group emphasised the importance of the role of the Chairmen of the scrutiny committees. They stated that this was a vital role and the Chairmen needed to be proactive and be able to identify the major issues and delve deeper into these.

The Group discussed other possible ways of improving scrutiny and noted that South Norfolk District Council had increased the influence of the opposition group by agreeing that the scrutiny committee did not have to be politically balanced. The Task Group also emphasised the importance of having shorter and sharper meetings and noted that some councils had a cut off point (e.g. 9.30 pm) at which time the meeting would be concluded.

Following a full discussion, the Chairman concluded that the main areas to be pursued were:

- Making scrutiny more effective
- Investigating further the overview role through Council
- Providing more support for training of Chairs and members of scrutiny committees
- Improving how Performance Management worked through committees
- Increasing the involvement between lead officers and Chairs to construct committee agendas

CTG21 GENERAL ISSUES

Sarah McLagan circulated a suggested draft template for committee reports which address some of the points which had been raised at the last meeting.

The Task Group felt that, whilst further work was needed, the template was useful. It was also suggested that a short summary of the purpose of each item could be included on the Agenda page.

Councillor A Dean said that he understood that the IDeA were willing to support the Council in improving Councillors knowledge of how councils worked and the Task Group agreed that this would be a useful initiative to pursue.

CTG22

NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 4 November 2004 and the Agenda would include items on the role of Full Council, Policy Development and report back from visits to other councils.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm.