

CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 6.00 pm on 4 NOVEMBER 2004

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

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

CTG23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CTG23 UPDATE ON VISITS TO OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

It was generally agreed that the template questionnaire had been very useful in making comparisons between the various local authorities.

On 26 October a visit had been made to Wellingborough Borough Council. Wellingborough operated a traditional committee system with three policy committees and one scrutiny committee. Meetings started at 7.00 pm and there was a guillotine at 10.00 pm. Whilst the Council and committees met more frequently the overall number of meetings was less than in Uttlesford because there were far fewer committees. Meetings were also of a much shorter duration.

It was noted that Wellingborough had an excellent CPA rating and member/officer working relationships were very good.

A visit to Watford City Council took place on 18 October 2004. Watford operated a Mayor and cabinet system with delegation to the portfolio holders and officers. Area committees also met three times each year but had no devolved powers. Watford also had a citizen's panel made up of 1,200 residents. Meetings lasted on average about two hours and there was a guillotine at 10.30 pm. Whilst there was no evidence of additional speed in decision-making, there was greater emphasis on clear policy development and quality of decisions.

It was noted that a visit would be made to South Norfolk District Council on 8 November 2004.

CTG25 THE ROLE OF FULL COUNCIL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Councillor Wilcock said that it was essential that the role of Full Council was reviewed and challenged. He suggested that routine items should be dropped from the agenda and the meetings used for real policy development and setting. This would ensure that strategic direction involved all 44 councillors. He also suggested that workshops and presentations by outside organisations

could be subsumed into the Council Meeting to assist in the process and help achieve better attendance at such events. He said that cross cutting issues such as access to services could best be discussed at Full Council.

Councillor Row said that the traditional council meeting was still important and was an opportunity for “backbench” Members to hear what was going on and to discuss issues with other colleagues.

Councillor C Dean said that a one-hour presentation or workshop followed by a time limited council meeting would be a useful step forward. Councillor Lelliott said that the current question time tended to be confrontational and he would like more opportunity for Members to put questions to the chairmen of committees in a more helpful and constructive environment.

The Chairman said that the main issues to be developed were looking at combining workshops with council meetings, making council meetings more frequent, providing more information to Members prior to meetings, enhancing the ability to question chairmen of committees and to address the problem of lengthy meetings. It was also felt that workshops needed to be more focused and possibly renamed as policy debates or training events.

Members were asked to pass any further comments to the Chief Executive and he would co-ordinate the suggestions made at this meeting and other comments received and provide a short report to the next meeting.

The next meeting was due to be held on 2 December 2004 and it was agreed that this would start at 5.30 pm and would include items on update on role of council, review of committees (including letter from Councillor Silver) and update on visits to other councils.

The Chairman said that the meeting on 6 January 2005 would start at 5.30 pm and would need to finalise the report which would go to the Council Meeting on 15 February 2005, with a view to full implementation from May 2005.

It was also agreed that a “policy debate” on the issue could be trialed prior to the Council Meeting on 15 February.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm.