

CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 5.00 pm on 21 DECEMBER 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 and M T Purkiss.

CTG26 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from M J Perry.

CTG27 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CTG28 UPDATED ON VISITS TO OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

On 2 December a visit had been made to Maldon District Council. Maldon operated a traditional committee system with three area committees exclusively for local non-strategic planning decisions. Whilst the Council agenda had been fairly heavy the meeting had lasted about an hour with little opportunity for debate or open dialogue and no public participation. The Chairman had confirmed that council meetings usually lasted about one hour and other meetings aimed to finish by no later than 9.30 pm. Whilst the Group considered that the visit to Maldon had been useful there was little that could be replicated in Uttlesford.

On 8 November a group had visited South Norfolk District Council. South Norfolk operated a cabinet system with regulatory and standards committees and a fifteen member scrutiny committee. There were also five policy development panels and task groups. It appeared that the involvement of opposition members worked well and the meeting attended had been well handled and allowed dialogue to take place.

On 25 November a group had visited Tynedale District Council. Tynedale operated a committee system but with one main committee entitled "The Corporate Policy and Management Board". This comprised eleven members with 6 Conservative, 3 Lib-Dems and two Independents. The population of Tynedale was about 60,000 and there were 52 villages spread over a very large geographical area. There were no area committees. Meetings of the Management Board started at 6.00 pm and the average length of meetings was 1¾ hours. There were good working relationships between members and officers with very little overt politics. Whilst there was a degree of consensus some Members felt isolated. Four scrutiny and overview, committees dealt with policy development on community health and culture, economy, environment and resources. The agenda for council meetings included one or two lines on each item giving a brief summary of the subject

matter. The Task Group considered that this would be a useful procedure to adopt in Uttlesford.

CTG29

THE ROLE OF FULL COUNCIL AND REVIEW OF COMMITTEES

The Task Group considered a report from officers setting out options for the future role of Council, Committees and Scrutiny and Overview. The Chairman considered that there were three main options:

- Do the statutory minimum – 3 Council meetings each year to deal with the setting of council tax and budget, the Best Value Performance Plan and an Annual Council Meeting to appoint committees, etc.
- Status quo with some adjustments to committee workloads.
- Increase the frequency of Council meetings and the number of key decisions which went to it and at the same time eliminate committees with the exception of regulatory, Standards and some form of scrutiny.

There was general consensus that there would be a number of advantages in the third option with key decisions going direct to Council and with Council Meetings on a more regular basis of 10-12 times per year. In particular, this would enable all councillors to be involved in key decisions.

The Chief Executive suggested that at the first Council Meeting of each year the work plan could be agreed and task groups or panels established to deal with various briefs and required to report back to the Council for a decision to be made. It was considered that this would enable the Council to concentrate on the recommendations and should ensure that more focused meetings took place. The work programme could also include a programme of workshops on key issues.

A number of peripheral items were discussed and there was general agreement that:

- The Council agenda should contain a short summary on the purpose of each item.
- Meetings should start at 7.00 pm.
- There should be a guillotine at Council meetings.

It was also suggested that some meetings could conclude with a social event to help improve communication and contact between all Members.

The Task Group then discussed the timetable for the completion of its work and the following dates were agreed:

- Meeting of Task Group to consider a summary report at 5.30 pm on 6 January 2005.

- Member Workshop on 1 February 2005 to share alternative models with Members.
- Outline report to Council Meeting on 15 February 2005.
- Full report to Council on 26 April 2005 to include revised constitution, etc.
- New constitution and structure to be adopted at Annual Council Meeting on 17 May 2005.

CTG30

SEASON'S GREETINGS

The Chairman wished all Members and Officers a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year.

The meeting ended at 6.45 pm.