

**CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON
ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 11.00 am on 4 JULY 2005**

Present: Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors C M Dean, E J Godwin, G Sell and S V Schneider.

Also present: Councillors C A Bayley and P A Wilcock.

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

CTG54 **APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Dean.

CTG55 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CTG56 **REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION – FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER
WORKSHOPS**

The Chairman thanked Officers for arranging the recent series of workshops which had been well attended and thanked Members for their participation in these.

The Chief Executive said that following the series of five workshops he would now be preparing a draft report for the Council Meeting on 19 July which would have a consensus based approach on the following five aspects:

- Committee Structure
- Role for Council
- Overview and Scrutiny
- Area Structures
- Task Groups

He said that this would be underpinned by a new draft Constitution. He said that the workshops had reinforced the view that the Council was not re-examining its decision to retain a Committee Structure and there was consensus that policy decisions needed to be taken as inclusively as possible and operational decisions needed to be taken at the lowest level possible.

The Chief Executive said that there had been consensus at the workshops that there should be a new style of report template which would include a summary, details of the impact on certain issues and details of the Ward which was affected. Each report would be a separate document and appendices would be kept separate. It was intended that this initiative would take effect from the September cycle of Committees. He said that the workshops had also looked at procedures and the style of debate and there had been support for “green paper” debates on key issues. It had also been suggested that workshops needed to be more effective and it should be made

clear whether they were member briefing/training sessions or policy seminars. It had also been suggested that at each Council Meeting Members should endorse the programme of workshops for the period up to the next Council Meeting.

In relation to Task Groups the general feeling was that these should be made up of between three and seven Members and be skills based rather than politically based and should be time limited with a clear remit.

The issue of area forums had also been raised at the workshops and a scenario of three areas had been put forward. Each area could not comprise more than 40% of the population or the area of the District and further work needed to be carried out on this issue.

In relation to Scrutiny, it had been suggested that there should be two Committees; a Performance Select Committee dealing with PI's, audit, best value and CPA and a Review and Petitions Committee which would deal with external scrutiny, call in and public petitions.

The Chief Executive said that the issue of Council meetings had involved much debate and the consensus appeared to be that the agenda should deal with public participation first, followed by the Leader and chairmen making reports which would then lead in to question time. The main issues would be taken next and the meeting would conclude with the formal issues. It had also been suggested that social gatherings could be held after Council meetings.

With regard to the Committee structure, the Chief Executive said that the consensus tended to support a three policy Committee structure comprising Community, Environment and Organisational Committees. The frequency and length of meetings would also need to be addressed. Councillor Sell said that outside organisations such as tenant panels and Museum Society representatives had well established links with the current Committees and this issue would need to be looked at carefully with the new structure.

The Chief Executive said that a number of other issues had been raised including whether the Constitution should provide that a Member should be removed from office if there was a vote of no confidence, whether it should be written in that the chairing of Scrutiny Committees should be with the Opposition Group and whether a mechanism was needed for substitution at Committees.

The Chief Executive said that he hoped to complete a draft report for the Council Meeting fairly shortly and the Executive Manager Corporate Governance would draft a Constitution to support this. He said that at the Council Meeting on 19 July the report could be debated but the Constitution, once moved and seconded, would stand adjourned to the Council Meeting on 18 October. He concluded that if the target dates were met, the new Constitution could take effect after the Council Meeting in October.

The Chairman congratulated the Chief Executive on an excellent and comprehensive report.

The meeting ended at 12.15pm. Page 2