

**CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 6.00 pm on 3 APRIL 2006**

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

Also present:- Councillor R F Freeman.

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

**CTG62 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**CTG63 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute CTG59 – Future Operation of the Standards Committee**

The Executive Manager Corporate Governance reported that guidance from the Standards Board on the composition of Standards Committee was still awaited.

**CTG64 REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION**

The Executive Manager Corporate Governance reported that a number of suggestions had been put forward by Members, but none of these would result in a change to the Council's Constitution.

**(i) Area Panels**

He said that he had drawn up a list of items which might be appropriate for delegation to the Area Panels. He said that the list included items such as residents' parking, alcohol free zones, alarm notification zones and dog control orders.

Councillor C M Dean said that she was pleased to hear that a list had been drawn up and felt that clearer delegation to area panels was essential. She referred to two recent issues which had been considered by the South-West Area Panel where the decision could not be taken at that level. Officers explained that committees could delegate to area panels any issue relevant to that area. The problems were that the system was still new and some decisions would involve budgetary considerations which needed to be looked at further. Councillor Sell said that proper delegation would avoid the current time delays and would give the area panels greater authority.

The Chief Executive said that when policy committees delegated specific decisions to area panels they could also recommend a change to the scheme of delegation so that the general issue could be dealt with more quickly in

future. He pointed out that there could be difficulties where there was not a budget for some of the issues which were delegated such as alcohol free zones which would require expenditure on consultation and signage.

Councillor Morson summarised the debate and concluded that the principle of taking local decisions at local level was supported.

## **(ii) Road Safety**

The Group then discussed the issue of Road Safety. Councillor Schneider said that at the last meeting of the North Area Panel it had been suggested that a Road Safety Advisory Committee could be reformed as a sub-group of that panel. Councillor Morson said that the way that the Road Safety Advisory Committees had been wound up was unfortunate and said that the input of partner groups was very important. However, he said that if they were reconstituted they could dominate proceedings at area panels.

Councillor C M Dean said that most of the issues raised at the former road safety advisory committees could have been discussed at parish council level and added that more strategic road safety issues could be dealt with at area panels.

Councillor Thawley said that he had attended the meeting of the East Area Panel and it had been agreed that written reports on issues such as accident statistics could still be submitted to the Area Panel, but there would be no need for police and highway attendance at every meeting. Councillor Godwin said she felt that the former Road Safety Advisory Committees were merely talking shops and the issues which had been raised could have been dealt with directly with the Highways Department and there was no need for all the parishes to discuss such specific matters.

The Chief Executive said that Tony Ciaburro, the Service Director, Highways and Transportation, had undertaken to provide support to Area Panels. He also pointed out that there was a road safety committee set up under the community safety umbrella and this body could take on more responsibility. He said that the committee team and other support officers were already stretched and if additional committees were set up it would be very difficult for these to be supported. Councillor Freeman accepted this point and said that the sub-group could be more informal and could be serviced by Councillors. The debate on this issue was concluded with general agreement that each area panel could address the issue of road safety in its own way.

## **(iii) Parish Liaison**

The Task Group then considered the issue of parish liaison meetings. Councillor Morson said that Councillor Savage had stated that, despite the setting up of area panels, he considered that parish liaison meetings still had a role to play particularly as they involved parishes across the area.

Councillor Freeman said that whilst the parish liaison meetings had some support they were not supported by Saffron Walden Town Council and he said that it was important not to duplicate effort. Councillor C M Dean suggested that parishes should be asked whether they felt that the parish

liaison meetings had any value and whether, in the light of area panels, they should continue. Councillor Thawley suggested that consultation should be with parish councillors rather than clerks. He also suggested that there was a need for training parishes on planning issues.

The Chief Executive said that parish liaison meetings had originally been set up to look at planning issues but their role had now been diluted. He understood that about half of the parish councils attended the meetings and concluded that there was a need for continued discussion with parish councils on their relationship with this Council.

Councillor Godwin felt that there was nothing which had been discussed at parish liaison meetings which could not have been dealt with elsewhere. Councillor Sell suggested that they might continue on an occasional basis. Councillor Freeman supported the suggestion of consultation with parish councillors and agreed that advice to parish councils on planning matters would be useful.

The Chief Executive said that the draft Corporate Plan included support for developing relationships with town and parish councils and a survey of all parish councillors on their expectations could form part of this process. Councillor Schneider suggested that any consultation should include a suggestion that parish liaison meetings could be taken on a training and workshop role, rather than liaison.

Councillor Morson, in concluding the debate, supported a survey of parish councillors and Councillor C M Dean suggested that district councillors should take soundings from the parish councils in their area.

#### **(iv) Appointments to Committees**

The Task Group then discussed concerns which had been raised by some members about the number of places on the Review and Petitions Committee. The Chief Executive explained the background to the number of seats on the two overview and scrutiny committees and said that for the sake of arithmetical convenience 19 places were available on the Review and Petitions and Performance Select Committees. He said that the numbers on each of these committees could be reversed and it was understood that the Chairman of the Performance Select Committee had confirmed that a lower number on that committee would provide good working arrangements. The Task Group supported the general principle of this change.

#### **(v) General**

In summing up the debate, the Chief Executive said that nothing which had been raised at the meeting would require an amendment to the Constitution. He reminded Members that if anything needed to be proposed which would require a change to the Constitution it needed to be raised at the next ordinary Council meeting. He added that he would be issuing a guidance note to all Members on the operation of the call in procedures. Finally, he said that the Constitution adopted last December envisaged that decision taking would be streamlined, but he had noted that in the past few months there had been

more extraordinary meetings and hoped that matters would settle down shortly.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm.