

**CONSTITUTION TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 5.30pm on 10 OCTOBER
2006**

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman
Councillors E J Godwin, S V Schneider and A R Thawley.

Also present:- Councillor S C Jones.

Officers in attendance:- S McLagan, M J Perry, S Seward and P
Snow.

CTG 65 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C M Dean and G Sell.

CTG 66 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2006 were approved as a correct record.

CTG 67 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute CTG 63 (i) – Future Operation of the Standards Committee

It was noted that guidance from the Standards Board was still awaited.

(ii) Minute CTG 64 – Review of the Constitution

Members reviewed the position relating to the operation of the constitution. The Executive Manager (Corporate Governance) said that the Licensing Committee had requested delegated powers to deal with new provisions relating to tables and chairs on pavements in connection with the consumption of food and drink.

Councillor Morson referred to the decision of the North Area Panel to establish an informal road safety task group. Councillor Godwin expressed her concern about the length of meetings and asked how many parishes had attended the most recent parish liaison meeting. Councillor Thawley confirmed that only regular attendees had been present.

A question was also raised about the attendance of County Council officers at area panel meetings and Councillor Morson said this would be subject to further review.

CTG 68 ARRANGEMENTS FOR DETERMINING CAR PARK CHARGES

Saffron Walden Town Centre Working Group (SWTCWG) had asked the Task Group for guidance as to the relationships and arrangements between itself, the North Area Panel, and other relevant committees.

Councillor Jones explained that the SWTCWG had expressed concerns because some major items affecting Saffron Walden town centre such as parking charges had not been referred to the Working Group for discussion. However, the Decriminalisation Working Group had discussed the parking charges review and had made recommendations to the Environment Committee without input from the SWTCWG.

Members had taken the view that the new committee system had led to unnecessary duplication in some areas and a lack of clarity in decision making. They had questioned where the Working Group slotted in to the whole process.

The Executive Manager (Quality of Life) said that officers themselves were confused by the relationship between policy and area committees. A clearer steer was needed from Members about which matters should be referred to SWTCWG as this was accountable to the Environment Committee rather than to the North Area Panel.

Councillor Jones agreed and said that no proper structure appeared to have been established to deal with the relationships between the various committees and groups.

In clarification, the Executive Manager confirmed that the Decriminalisation Group had been established to examine parking and that SWTCWG had been tasked with looking at matters relating to the town centre. Both groups reported directly to Environment. Consultation with SWTCWG members on the review of parking charges had been carried out by e-mail because of the shortage of time.

Councillor Thawley said that there should be an automatic reporting system of the working groups to area panels but that minutes should be submitted for information only unless there were specific recommendations. Councillor Godwin was concerned about unnecessary duplication and overlapping of responsibilities. It was also agreed that the Minutes of the North Area Panel would go for information to the SWTCWG so that they are aware of issues that might be of relevance to the town centre.

In summary, Councillor Morson said that area panels must be allowed to determine their own agenda items and had the option to seek advice from working and task groups where necessary. In the normal course of events, he suggested that Minutes of working groups would be submitted to the relevant area panel, together with additional information where required. Area panels could then feed back Minutes, recommendations and reports to the relevant working/task group as well as to the policy committee where necessary.

The Executive Manager (Corporate Governance) presented a proposed job description and person specification for independent members of the Standards Committee.

Councillor Godwin felt that the person specification was such that any position would be almost impossible to fill. For example, the requirement that any representative should be independent of any political party and local government. Councillor Thawley agreed and said that the most important consideration was that the person would be able to act independently of any political organisation and was not a current party member. He also asked about the position of a member of the Freemasons.

The Executive manager responded that it would in his judgement be acceptable to change the reference to party political involvement to read 'Not a current member of a political party'. However, the essential requirements were set out in statute and could not be amended.

On the question of membership of the Freemasons, this was not something that could be specified in the documents. Members of the Standards Committee would be bound by the code of conduct and would have to make a declaration for the register of interests.

It was agreed that the advertisement be amended to refer to 'district councillors and town and parish councillors' and that the words 'the community' be added after 'Council'. The two documents were otherwise approved for publication.

CTG 70

ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS – POLICE LIAISON

In his absence, the Chief Executive had asked the Task Group to consider the relationship between area panels and the Police community consultative forums. There were currently seven consultative forums based upon neighbourhood policing team boundaries and consequently did not match area panel boundaries. Only three of these forums fell entirely within the boundaries of a single area panel.

He suggested that it might be sensible to designate a member as the lead liaison between each of the police forums and the Council, by agreement between those ward members concerned.

On the broader point, he had suggested that area panel meetings could commence earlier to incorporate a lengthy public engagement slot and then, following a suitable break, the formal business could follow.

Councillor Godwin's view was that police liaison should be conducted mainly through parish councils and that only the major issues should be filtered back to the area panels.

Councillor Schneider said that she would be happy to nominate members to attend the consultative forums and that area panels would be able to invite the police to attend where necessary. She did not agree with changing arrangements for area panel meetings.

On the other hand, district councillors were free to attend the police forum meetings in any case so there was no necessity to make nominations.

It was agreed that notice of police consultative meetings should continue to be given to the relevant ward members and the parishes within the forum areas and that these arrangements should be kept entirely separate from the area panels. However, each area panel had the option, as now, to invite police representation where felt necessary.

The meeting ended at 6.30pm.