

Minutes of the meeting of the **Structural & Procedural Review Sub-Committee** held on **17 July 2001** when there were present:

Cllr R E Vingoe – Chairman

Cllr R F R Adams
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr D R Helson
Cllr G A Mockford

Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

80 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

81 MODERNISING AGENDA – DRAFT SUBMISSION TO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive setting out a proposed draft submission to Central Government in connection with the requirement to introduce a new decision making structure under the Local Government Act 2000. The Chief Executive circulated a document outlining responses received from partner organisations and interest groups consulted on the proposed submission (attached at Appendix 1 to these Minutes).

In terms of Planning Committee size, the finalised report from ORC International on the results of Focus Group work was about to be published. Based on the draft report, indications were that the Focus Group had felt that:-

- A small forum could lead to greater speed and efficiency.
- A larger forum could lead to fuller and more considered debate, allowing the wide voicing of any concerns. It should not necessarily be seen as a problem if a large forum means lengthier debate (the focus groups definition of “large” had yet to be clarified).
- The public should perhaps have more access/ability to influence the decision making process.

The Chief Executive confirmed that, once the finalised Focus Group report had been received, it would be circulated to all Members of the Council

In discussing the Planning Committee aspect, a Member wished to re-emphasise the view that the work of the Planning Committee could sometimes be seen as having too high in priority when compared with that of other Committees. Comment was also made that the public currently had a number of opportunities to comment on planning matters in advance of meetings and that, by the time of their attendance at a Committee Meeting, Members should have already received all salient information. Inviting applicants to speak at Planning Committees may also lead to the introduction of arguments based on emotion. A further observation was made that the comments of Hawkwell Parish Council on Planning Committee size did not match a Member's understanding of the debate held by the Parish. This would be clarified.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that a number of Local Authorities did have arrangements whereby applicants, agents or objectors were provided an opportunity to speak at Planning Committee meetings. There were, however, varied views on the effectiveness of this approach.

In discussing the overall submission requirements, a Member referred to the positive aspects of being able to consider revisions to the current Committee structure. These included the opportunity to reduce the number of times debate is revisited and the absorption of some work currently allocated to Sub-Committees and working parties into the work of mainstream committees.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- The Government Regional Office had recently confirmed that the Council's summary of the main areas to be covered in the Council's submission was in line with the published guidance.
- The submission needed to be clear as to why the Councils proposals led to improvement, particularly in terms of efficiency, transparency and accountability.
- In reaching its final conclusions about preferred Committee size, the Council would need to include reasoning as to why the agreed approach would lead to improvement.
- From the experience of other Local Authorities, there was value in ensuring that the Council's overview/scrutiny activity was pro-active and mindful of the Council's policy direction, rather than just reviewing every decision per se.

During its consideration of the proposed submission, the Sub-Committee concurred with a Member that it would be appropriate to revise paragraph 7.2 to indicate that the Council would continue to consider matters in public rather than private.

The Sub-Committee noted that the Chief Executive would be attending a meeting with Regional Government officials as part of regular update on progress of the modernisation agenda. Any further relevant information from that meeting would be provided to all Members for the Extraordinary Council on 31 July.

Members endorsed the proposed submission and it was:--

RECOMMENDED

That the proposed draft submission on new political arrangements for Rochford District Council (as revised and attached to the signed copy of these Minutes) be agreed. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.

Meeting

Date
