

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL – NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek Members' views on the new political arrangements operating at Essex County Council.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Since May 2000, the County Council has been piloting a new decision making structure.
- 2.2 Under the pilot arrangements the old style committee system has been largely replaced by a 'Leader and Executive' style system with the following key components:
- An **Executive** (or Cabinet). A Leader plus executive of 14 other councillors drawn from across all political groups. Eight councillors have special areas of responsibility or 'portfolios'. Collectively, the Executive make decisions relating to the Council's policies, budgets and service delivery.
 - **Select Committees** (similar to parliamentary Select Committees) to scrutinise any area of Council's business or how well the council is doing, recommend policy changes and generally seek the views of partner agencies and local people.
 - A **Standards Committee** chaired by an independent person to monitor the conduct of staff and councillors and to oversee ethical standards.
 - **Development Control and Regulation Committee** dealing with development control, highways and traffic regulations, rights of way, commons registration, listed building and tree preservation orders.
 - **Interim Committees** – to meet existing legal requirements, a Social Services Committee and an Education Panel have been retained for the pilot period.

The full Council meeting continues to involve all 79 councillors in strategic decision making but the format has been changed so that debates on issues of major significance can take place.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The County Council is currently evaluating the operation of the new arrangements and is seeking views through carrying out a public consultation exercise.
- 3.2 In particular, the County Council is keen to receive views as to whether the new structure has resulted in:-
- (i) Greater transparency in decision making.
 - (ii) Greater openness in decision making.
 - (iii) The promotion of the importance of partnership working.
 - (iv) The greater involvement of other individuals and organisations in the work of the County Council.
- 3.3 The County would be pleased to receive views on the perceived working of the Executive Board and the Scrutiny and Standards Committees to date. Comments are invited by 15th November. To meet this deadline, urgency action will be taken so that the Committee's views can be forwarded to the County Council as the District Council's response.

4 OFFICER COMMENT

- 4.1 In the District Council's communications and working arrangements with the County Council on a range of issues over the past 6 months, a number of the District Council's Members have had first hand experience of the way in which the new system is operating. Clearly, this consultation by the County Council represents an opportunity for Members to formally express their views on their experiences to date. From an officer viewpoint, there are a number of examples, Albert Jones Court, Meals on Wheels, etc., where the importance of partnership working has not been demonstrated or where necessarily, there would appear to be either greater transparency or openness. In addition, attendance at a number of the Scrutiny Committees suggests that there is still much work to be done in relation to their role, operation and subject matter, not to mention the role/relationships of those invited to attend and participate.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Nothing specific

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Nothing specific for this Authority

7 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

Nothing specific

8 RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee determine its views for submission to the County Council in connection with the operation of the latter's new decision making arrangements.

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