
PROPOSED NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report follows on from that presented to Council on 27th February, 2007 (min 52/07). It seeks Members' agreement to the operation of a revised political decision making structure as outlined from the new municipal year.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the February Council meeting, Members agreed to consider a possible new political decision making structure, for operation from May 2007. Since that report, consultation on the proposals has been carried out, focussing particularly on key partner organisations. The Remuneration Panel has met to consider the implications of an Executive Board and the role of Member champions and the existing constitution has been re-examined, to take into account the possible changes required should Members decide to move to a new structure.
- 2.2 This report therefore includes as appendices the responses received to the possible proposed changes (Appendix 1) and the key revisions required to the main parts of the existing constitution (Appendix 2 – being circulated separately). The main findings of the Remuneration Panel are included as a separate report. Set out below are the main changes proposed to the political decision making structure so that Members can now decide whether they wish to implement the proposals from the start of the new municipal year in May. It should be noted that the proposals are not seen as an “end product” in themselves set in “tablets of stone”, but more the establishment of a framework for a revised way of member decision making which will evolve and develop over time.
- 2.3 In this way, Members will be able to proactively determine the pace and nature of changes to the political decision making process, rather than find themselves playing “catch up” or having further changes imposed upon them.

3 PROPOSED CHANGES

- 3.1 As outlined in the February report, the proposals before Members attempt to address a number of issues and build upon the structure already in place. It retains as much of the existing system as possible and has been constructed to ensure Members have a range of opportunities to participate in and inform the Council's decision making process. The powers of Full Council remain, the Review Committee remains and Committees such as the Development Control Committee remain.
- 3.2 The proposed structure provides a clearer executive decision making forum, with better accountability and transparency as to Members' responsibilities.

This is achieved through the proposed replacement of the five Policy Committees that are currently in existence with an Executive Board comprising 9 Members.

- 3.3 At the same time, the proposed structure recognises the Government's growing interest around neighbourhoods, localities and the role of ward councillors through establishing a new more local arena for ward councillors to discuss and take decisions on local issues, with the establishment of 3 area committees; west, central and east. Appendix 4 provides a diagram of the proposed new structure. Appendix 3 shows the existing structure for comparison purposes.

- 3.4 The proposals for Members' decision are as follows:

Full Council – retain as existing

Policy Committees

Policy, Finance and Strategic Performance)
Community Services) Delete all of these and replace with a new
Environmental Services) Executive Board and
Leisure, Tourism and Heritage) 3 Area Committees
Planning, Policy and Transportation Committee)	

Regulatory and Probity Committees

Development Control	retain with existing powers
Appeals Committee	retain with existing powers
Licensing Committee	retain with existing powers
Audit Committee	retain with existing powers
Emergency Planning Committee	delete – responsibilities would be taken up by the Executive Board
Standards Committee	retain with existing powers
Review Committee	retain with existing powers

- 3.5 The Executive Board would comprise 9 members including the Leader, Deputy Leader and the Chairmen of the three Area Committees. The members of the Executive Board would be nominated at Annual Council, although the identity of the three Area Committee Chairmen would not be

known until elected by the respective Area Committee. The Executive Board would take over the role and responsibilities of the Policy Committees and, in an emergency situation, the role of the Emergency Planning Committee.

- 3.6 Whilst specific matters could only be determined by Council as at present, the Executive Board would become the engine for processing a majority of the Council's general workload around policy and service development. It would meet on a three weekly basis in the evenings. The meetings would be open to the public, unless there were specific private and confidential items on the agenda as now.
- 3.7 Within the Executive Board there would be specific member roles, with an individual member responsible for:-
- Overall Strategy and Partnerships
 - Resources and Service Development
 - Environment
 - Community
 - Planning Policy and Transportation
 - Leisure, Tourism and Heritage
 - Plus the three Area Committee Chairmen

However, at least for the first year of operation, it is proposed that the Executive Board operates as a collective in its decision making rather than specific powers being delegated to each individual member. The Executive Board would have a published "Forward Plan" indicating the main areas to be looked at and key decisions to be made over a period.

- 3.8 As now, decisions would be published and subject to call-in by the Review Committee and referral to Council. The Executive Board members would be supported by "Task and Finish" Sub-Committees where appropriate, in the same way that Sub-Committees currently undertake work on behalf of a Policy Committee. These Sub-Committees, as now, would not be permanent bodies, but would be set up to aid the decision making process. It would be for the Executive Board to determine the appropriateness of establishing a Sub-Committee to cover work in a particular area. Initially, however, it would seem sensible to have Sub-Committees overseeing the contract renewal process and the Local Development Framework chaired by the appropriate member of the Executive Board.
- 3.9 In summary, the Executive Board's work would revolve around:-
- (i) the development and review of plans and strategies
 - (ii) Budget review and preparation
 - (iii) Land, property, finance and resource issues
 - (iv) Implementation of matters in accordance with agreed policies, procedures and budgets
 - (v) Service development and review

In essence, the normal business operation of the Council.

- 3.10 The three Area Committees would cover the west, central and east parts of the District, as follows:-
- West – Rayleigh and Rawreth
 - Central – Hullbridge, Hockley and Hawkwell
 - East –Rochford, Ashingdon, Canewdon, Foulness, Stambridge, Paglesham, Barling, Sutton and Great Wakering
- 3.11 Each would meet in their area, rather than all meetings being held in Rayleigh at the Civic Suite. Meetings would initially be six weekly in the evenings. All Ward Councillors in the area would be represented on the Committee. Each Councillor would have voting rights. It is proposed that one representative from each of the Parishes also be invited along to the relevant Area Committee. However, such Parish representatives would not have voting rights. The local police and the appropriate representatives from the County would be invited to attend and participate, but not vote. As appropriate, other bodies such as the Primary Care Trust could also be invited along to contribute to the consideration of particular issues.
- 3.12 The agenda for the Area Committees would revolve around specific local issues – community safety, local environment and community issues, local highway matters, etc, or matters specifically referred to the Area Committee by the Executive Board. The agenda would also include a specific slot for the public to raise matters relating to their locality.
- 3.13 Each Area Committee could look at issues around local provision and service delivery. For example, it could receive regular monitoring reports on refuse collection, street cleaning and grounds maintenance in the area. It could also look at the play areas and public open spaces in the area and make recommendations as to possible changes in provision. Each Area Committee could act as a focus in identifying the needs of the community in the area, via consultation and feedback. The Area Committees could also advise on the arrangements for the provision of information about local services and other information to the people of the area.
- 3.14 Over time, it is envisaged that some of the budgets currently determined and spent centrally around community safety, the environment and community could be delegated to the Area Committees for decision over issues within their locality. This could be brought in from 2008/2009, depending on how the Area Committees evolve. Again, the decisions of the Area Committees would be subject to call-in and referral as outlined above. Here though, Members would need to remember that if a decision was called in by the Review Committee, those Members sitting on the Review Committee from that Area Committee present when the decision was taken would not be able to participate.

- 3.15 Based on the above, the composition of the Area Committees in terms of membership would be as follows:-

West Area Committee	16 District Ward Councillors (with voting rights) plus 2 Parish Representatives plus police and ECC Representatives to attend
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Central Area Committee	14 District Ward Councillors (with voting rights) plus 3 Parish Representatives plus police and ECC Representatives to attend
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East Area Committee	9 District Ward Councillors (with voting rights) plus 9 Parish Representatives plus police and ECC Representatives to attend
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- 3.16 There would be no member substitutes permitted for either the Executive Board or the Area Committees. Other than these changes, the basic political decision making structure, around the Review Committee, the Standards Committee and other regulatory committees could remain as now, although members views and decisions are sought on two further specific matters:-

- (i) the Chairmanship of the Review Committee
- (ii) the Chairmanship of the Standards Committee

- 3.17 With the change to an Executive Board Structure with Area Committees, officers are of the view that there would be merit in the chairmanship of the Review Committee being given to the minority party, rather than retained by the majority party. However, the overall structure could still function, although perhaps not with the same level of perceived balance and transparency, if the chairmanship was retained by the majority party.

- 3.18 Secondly, legislation will require the Standards Committee to have an independent chairman in due course. Members may therefore wish to pre-empt the legislation and agree to an independent chairman of the Standards Committee from the new municipal year.

- 3.19 The February report made reference to Member champions. That matter has now been examined by the Review Committee and its recommendations on the number of champions and their role is before Members this evening as a separate agenda item. Whether Members agree to the number and role as outlined will be equally applicable whether the Council moves to a new political structure or not.

- 3.20 Lastly, the February report also discussed the possibility of more formalised liaison arrangements with Castle Point Borough Council and Southend Borough Council on matters of common interest. Members will see from the consultation responses that both Authorities would appear to be willing to look

into the matter in more detail and see what is possible. Thus, this matter will be subject to further discussion with both Councils before any details are brought forward for Members consideration and agreement.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Members are now being asked whether they wish to agree to the operation of an Executive Board and three Area Committee structure from the new municipal year.
- 4.2 Members also need to consider too whether the Chairman of the Review Committee should be a member of the opposition party from May, and whether the Chairman of the Standards Committee should be an independent Member, as will be required by legislation in due course. In connection with joint working with Southend Borough Council and Castle Point Borough Council, further discussions are required with both Authorities before a report is brought forward as to how a joint liaison committee between the three authorities would specifically work, covering such issues as governance, reporting arrangements and matters to be covered.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Council **RESOLVES**
- (1) To agree to the implementation of a new political structure from May 2007, involving the operation of an Executive Board and three Area Committees, as outlined in the report.
 - (2) Subject to (1), to agree to the changes to the main elements of the Constitution as contained in Appendix 2.
 - (3) Regardless of the above, to determine whether:-
 - The Chairman of the Review Committee should be a member of the opposition party from the new municipal year.
 - The Chairman of the Standards Committee should be an Independent Member from the new municipal year.

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Background Papers:-

None

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