
MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT – REVIEW OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL’S DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the District Council’s review of its political decision making structure and includes the results of the recent survey undertaken on the Council’s behalf by ORC International.
- 1.2 The Council is required by statutory guidance to submit a preferred decision making structure to the Secretary of State for the Environment and Transport by July 2001. The same guidance requires the Council to consult widely with local people and to ensure that its preferred option takes account of the feedback received.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 During March this year, ORC International undertook a market research survey on the views of Rochford residents on the Government’s four alternative political decision making structures. This research comprised a postal survey of 612 residents; the questionnaire used being based on feedback received from a focus group of local people held in February.
- 2.2 ORC has now submitted a copy of the findings from the survey and these are summarised below. A full copy of the findings together with a copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix A to this report.

3 RESULTS OF ORC SURVEY

- 3.1 The ORC survey achieved a 33% response (203 questionnaires returned) and is therefore accurate to + or – 7%.
- 3.2 The preferences expressed in the survey in response to the question “which is your preferred option”, were

Streamlined Committee Structure	71.4%
Mayor and Cabinet	8.9%
Council Leader and Cabinet	9.9%
Mayor and Council Manager	5.9%

Of equal interest are the comments expressed by residents as summarised from page 8 onwards in the attached report.

- 3.3 The District Council in a separate exercise has issued copies of the same questionnaire to key partners, including all Town and Parish

Councils. The questionnaire has also been issued to the general public from the reception desks at the Rochford offices and the Civic Suite at Rayleigh, from local libraries, as part of the mobile exhibition and as a supplement within Rochford District Matters. A copy of the questionnaire is also available on the Council's website.

- 3.4 The Council's own survey is still continuing and the intention is to add the findings to the results already obtained by ORC. For each additional 100 questionnaires returned, the margin of error in the survey will improve by around +/- 1%. Details of the responses received up to the date of this meeting will be reported orally.

4 THE WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 The District Council initially expressed a preference for the introduction of a streamlined committee structure. The survey results obtained by ORC appear to confirm the Council's view of the merits of that option. However, the Council will need to await the results from the wider survey initiative.

5 A NEW CONSTITUTION FOR ROCHFORD

- 5.1 Whichever option is selected, the next step will be to prepare a new constitution for the Authority. This constitution must also be the subject of public consultation and submitted to the Secretary of State for approval by the same deadline of July 2001.
- 5.2 The new constitution is required to set out the role of the Council and that of Members and Officers. It must also contain details of how any new structure will work and appropriate procedural standing orders, standing orders for contracts and financial regulations. The constitution will also need to contain arrangements for the appointment and operation of a standards committee, new codes of conduct for Members and Officers and a protocol for Member/Officer relations.
- 5.3 Whilst it is important not to pre-empt the final consultation results, there is much work that is common to all options and Members are asked to endorse that this work now proceeds. The work will be based on the guidance now issued by the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions. It is proposed that a draft constitution be brought to an extraordinary meeting of the Council to be arranged for mid May this year together with the results of the public consultation exercise. Details of any further consultation will also be brought forward at that time.
- 5.4 The Sub-Committee will be mindful that whilst the Council anticipates introduction of a new decision making structure in May 2002, the committee timetable has been kept clear from January 2002 onwards so that a trial of any new arrangements may be held.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The cost of undertaking public consultation on the alternative decision making structures is being met from within the Council's existing consultation budgets. An assessment of the likely costs of introducing a new structure will be made once Members have confirmed their preferred option.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council is required to introduce a new decision making structure by the Local Government Act 2000 and subsidiary regulations.

8 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 In any new structure the Council will need to consider how it wishes to relate to the Town and Parish Councils around the District.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Sub-Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and to **RECOMMEND** to the Finance and General Purposes Committee that work on the preparation of a Constitution for the Council should commence. (CD(LPA))

Andrew Smith

Head of Administrative and Member Services

Background Papers:

Local Government Act 2000 and subsidiary regulations and guidance
ORC consultation report attached.

For further information please contact Andrew Smith on:-

Tel:- 01702 318135
E-Mail:- andrew.smith@rochford.gov.uk