
Minutes of the meeting of the **Structural & Procedural Review Sub-Committee** held on **5 December 2000** when there were present:

Cllr C R Morgan (Chairman)

Cllr R Adams
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr D R Helson
Cllr Mrs J Helson

Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive
J Honey – Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
A Smith – Head of Administrative and Member Services
J Bostock – Principal Committee Administrator

69 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 November 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

70 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from the Chief Executive in relation to suggested Committee arrangements under the fourth option (introduction of a modified committee system) and the consultation required.

The presentation covered possible new Committee models which could be applied based on both a 40 and 39 Member Council (39 being the number set within the revised draft recommendations of the Local Government Commission) and provided examples of how the Council's work could be applied to the fourth option.

Compared to the number of seats available under the current Committee structure, the introduction of arrangements based on the fourth option was likely to mean some reduction in opportunities for Members to sit on Committees, particularly as the Government had indicated that the maximum membership of Committees should be 15. Member activity could become more specialist given the need to separate service committee work from scrutiny.

During debate there was general agreement that it would be logical to select a model that retained maximum facility for Members to have involvement in the Committee process. In terms of pro rata representation, a Member wished to emphasise the value of ensuring that, subject to political balance, all parties had a presence on the

equivalent of the current Finance & General Purposes Committee. It was accepted that it would be logical to work on the assumption that the future Council would comprise 39 Members.

Responding to Member questions on Option 4, Officers advised that:-

- Given that there must be a separation of Councillor activity between service and scrutiny committees, appointment making difficulties were likely to increase in proportion to the size/number of service committees.
- Whilst the Authority could indicate a preferred option, the Council would still need to consult on all four options. Given the advice and guidance received from the Government, there would be a need for initial consultation on broad principles followed by further consultation on more detailed proposals.
- Further guidance on the payment of allowances was awaited.
- A feature of the Standards Committee would be the appointment of at least one non-Council Member. Such a Committee was likely to meet on an adhoc basis as and when required.
- As a general observation, it could be demonstrated that the overview and scrutiny element of option 4 introduced accountability and smaller Committee numbers would enable effective working. Clear terms of reference would assist transparency.
- Whichever structure was finally agreed, there would need to be opportunity to make further adjustment to elements of detail in the light of experience.

In reviewing possible Committee models, comment was made on the value of keeping the membership level of scrutiny Committees relatively low to enable focus. The Sub-Committee endorsed the view of a Member that it would be of assistance if officers could provide all Members with terms of reference for Scrutiny/Overview, Appeals/Licensing and Standards Committees and the activity of Members serving on those bodies.

In terms of consultation, the Sub-Committee endorsed the view of the Chief Executive that this should be via as many mechanisms as possible, including a special edition of Rochford District Matters, the Council's mobile exhibition unit, the website and appropriate opinion poll/focus group activity. In terms of the latter, the Chief Executive was currently in consultation with a polling organisation on the possibilities available. Members also felt that the possibilities for including some type of prize draw to encourage public response should be investigated if this was likely to increase the number of returns.

It was noted that the timeframe was such that consultation would need to be undertaken to allow the reporting of outcomes to the March 2001 Committee Cycle. Authorities would be expected to give weighting to public opinion. The Chief Executive indicated the likely costing of a special consultation edition of Rochford District Matters which would be in full colour. The cost could be met from monies within the budget for Best Value consultation.

It was recognised that, given the timeframe, work on making arrangements for consultation would need to commence. The Chief Executive would welcome any observations Members may have on consultation possibilities.

Following a Motion moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor Mrs M A Weir relating to a preferred model within option 4 it was

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That suggested new Committee structure (E) (appended to these Minutes) be the favoured model, subject to appointment to the Policy and Finance Committee providing for the widest possible political representation within pro rata rules.
- (2) That consultation on new political structures involve the widest possible number of mechanisms. (CE)

The Meeting closed at 9.04pm.

Chairman.....

Date.....