

Review Committee – 7 April 2009

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **7 April 2009** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs C A Weston

Cllr Mrs G A Lucas-Gill

Cllr M Maddocks

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr D Merrick

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs T Livings and M J Steptoe.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
P Gowers - Overview & Scrutiny Officer
M Power - Committee Administrator

83 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

84 REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

The Committee considered the final report of the project team on the review of the operation of the political decision making structure.

During discussion, it was observed that all key decisions taken by individual Portfolio Holders were identified on the Forward Plan and that Portfolio Holders could always be contacted directly if Members had questions. The report included a recommendation that, in order to assist Members and the public, a summary of each decision to be made should be included in the Forward Plan. Under the new 'stronger leadership model of governance' adopted by the Council in April 2008, a Portfolio Holder is accountable for individual decisions made and there is the opportunity of calling in any decision. It was noted that the report recommended that the use of advisory groups for policy development by Portfolio Holders should be encouraged.

Paragraph 7.5.1 of the Report was amended to read 'any key decisions that are due to be made by the Executive'.

Recommended to the Executive

- (1) That in future Area Committee meetings should be held less frequently, with provision made in the timetable for special meetings if required.
- (2) That the possibility of using additional microphones for the Members of the Area Committee and the introduction of a hearing loop are explored.
- (3) That alternative room layouts are explored in respect of the Area Committee venues to ensure that the members of the public are able to see, hear and follow proceedings.
- (4) That Area Committee Members (District and Parish) be given the opportunity to answer the questions raised by members of the public.
- (5) That the Ward Councillors are available prior to an Area Committee meeting should a Member of the public wish to engage with them and the promotion of the meetings should include mention of this.
- (6) That following their appointment, the Area Committee Chairman meet with the lead officers for the Area Committees and their deputies in order to promote a consistency of approach and plan what topics they would like to be presented to the meetings, and that an aide memoire be provided for each meeting.
- (7) That the following changes to the Area Committee Agendas are made:-
 - The Community Forum to include updates from the police and County Highways or other public agencies as appropriate.
 - The use of the term “spotlight issues” is removed and instead details of the purpose of any Agenda items are included on the Agenda, (e.g. whether for public consultation, decision, information etc.)
 - The update on matters raised during the formal part of the meeting should be an agenda item, with the expectation that comments are on an “exception” basis.
- (8) That the rules to ask public questions through the Community Forum part of the meeting at Area Committees, contained in appendix 1 of the report, be adopted.
- (9) That answers provided to members of the public at Area Committees are in plain English and free from technical jargon.
- (10) That the provision of a budget allocation for each Area Committee, to allow them to decide which local issues need supporting, be examined in more detail by the Review Committee during the next municipal year.

- (11) That the provision of Ward level budgets be examined in more detail by the Review Committee during the next municipal year.
- (12) That the use of advisory groups for policy development by Portfolio Holders is encouraged.
- (13) That the role of Executive Support Member is established to aid Portfolio Holders and to provide an element of succession planning.
- (14) That a summary, in plain English, of the decision to be made is included in the Key Decision column of the Forward Plan.
- (15) That the quarterly performance reports are submitted to the Review Committee to allow Members of the Review Committee to examine and challenge performance.
- (16) That the Review Committee scrutinise the Local Strategic Partnership and related partnership arrangements on behalf of the Council.
- (17) That the reviews of partnerships undertaken by the Audit Committee should be the responsibility of the Review Committee from the start of the 2009/10 Municipal Year.
- (18) That the Review Committee take on the powers of overview and scrutiny for crime and disorder matters.
- (19) That the membership of the Review Committee is increased to 12 Members and non Review Committee Members will be invited to sit on the project teams undertaking reviews.
- (20) That, where possible, continuity of Membership be a consideration for appointments to the Review Committee, with appointments to be for a period of two years. (HICS)

Recommended to the Standards Committee

That a training course on handling public meetings is offered to the Area Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen to assist them in their roles. (HICS)

85 ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the draft annual report to be submitted to Full Council on its workings.

It was noted that the report should have included details of the Rochford Housing Association (RHA) visit to a meeting of the Review Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny officer would develop some wording on this aspect in consultation with the Chairman.

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It was noted that the meeting in respect of Connaught Environmental Ltd, which had been cancelled due to bad weather, would be rescheduled in the next Municipal Year. It was also noted that the Committee had not received official notification of the subsidised service being provided by Essex County Council in respect of the No 7&8 Arriva bus services; a report would therefore be submitted to the first meeting of the Review Committee in the next Municipal Year.

It was agreed that, to provide a more accurate picture, the wording in respect of item 7 of the performance measures on page 6.9 of the report should be amended to read: 'Whether sufficient information is provided to witnesses of the Review Committee or its project teams about the Overview and Scrutiny process.' This amended wording would result in amendments to the comments in item 7 and necessitate seeking the views of witnesses in respect of item 8, which would be reflected in the report.

A report detailing suggested topics for the Committee's future work programme will be submitted to the Committee's first meeting in the new Municipal Year.

Resolved

- (1) That, subject to the inclusion of reference to the meeting with the RHA and changes to the wording in respect of Item 7 (detailed above), the annual report be submitted to Council. (HICS)

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm.

Chairman

Date

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