

PROPOSED NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURES – ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates Members of the County Council and Members of the Parish/Town councils in respect of the District Council's proposed new political structure.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Unlike the County Council, Unitary Authorities and larger District Councils, Rochford District, with a population of under 85,000, has had to consider 4 options as opposed to 3, in terms of arriving at a new political structure.
- 2.2 The 4 options considered were:-
- Mayor and Cabinet
 - Council Leader and Cabinet
 - Mayor and Council Manager
 - Revised Committee Structure
- 2.3 As a result of consultation carried out earlier this year through a variety of medium, the majority response (70%) was in favour of developing a revised Committee structure. There was very little support for any of the other 3 options, and particularly the concept of an elected mayor.
- 2.4 The revised Committee system was thought to represent the most appropriate structure for a District as diverse as Rochford, which comprises a variety of urban and rural communities. It was apparent from the consultation exercise that many respondents considered that both the Mayor option and the Leader and Cabinet option would place too much power in the hands of either one person or one section of the community.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Based on the consultation responses and the feedback received, the Council has therefore decided to opt for a new revised Committee system and to work up this option in more detail. The Council's proposals were submitted to Central Government at the beginning of

August and further work is now underway around the revised Standing Orders/Financial Regulations, etc. That will accompany the new decision making structure.

- 3.2 The Council's current decision making structure is outlined in Appendix 1. Under the Full Council, there are 4 main committees plus a Planning Services Committee, which takes decisions in connection with planning applications and planning enforcement matters, and an Appeals Panel. Three of the 4 main committees comprise 20 Councillors each, whilst the Audit Services Committee comprises 11 Councillors. Planning Services Committee comprises all 40 Councillors, whilst the Appeals Panel comprises 9 Councillors. Underneath this structure there are currently 14 Sub-Committees and over 20 Working Groups.
- 3.3 The revised new Committee structure that the Council intends to put in place comprises Full Council, 3 Policy/Service Committees, mirrored by 3 Overview/Scrutiny Committees covering the same areas, an Appeals and Licensing Committee, a Planning Committee and a Standards Committee. The structure is outlined in Appendix 2 whilst the functions are detailed in Appendix 3.
- 3.4 Most of the work around Best Value, policy development and review will be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, who will also have the facility to examine the decisions of the Policy/Service Committees. It is envisaged that the majority of activities currently undertaken by sub-committees and Working Groups will be conducted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 3.5 The intention is to bring in the new scheme in a fully operational way from May 2002, following the District Council elections. As Members will be aware, the Local Government Commission's proposals on electoral review necessitate a reduction in Councillors from 40 to 39.
- 3.6 It will also mean that instead of the usual elections by thirds, there will be all out elections for the District Council in May 2002. Thus it seems appropriate that a new Council is accompanied by a new streamlined committee structure.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are clearly resource implications in terms of both Member and Officer time in the development and introduction of any new political structure. However, the overall cost of the exercise is unlikely to be apparent until the system has been introduced and has been operating for a period.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 That the Sub-Committee note the details of the District Council's proposed new decision making structure and the timetable for implementation. (CEX)

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