

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL PANEL

**Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 12 February 2008 at 5.30 pm
in the Committee Room, Borough Offices, Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillor P S Farmer (Chairman)
Councillors Chappell, Clifton-Brown, Cox, Hale, Oliver, and
Mrs P A Warby

BY INVITATION: Councillor Mrs Levack (Chairman of the Development Control
Committee), Councillor Ray (Portfolio Holder for Performance and
Organisational Development) and Councillor Thorndyke (a Vice-
Chairman of the Development Control Committee)

33. Substitutes

No substitutions were declared.

34. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

35. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

36. Declarations of Interests

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

37. Member Development Update

The Panel considered Report Y548 (previously circulated) which sought approval to develop a draft programme for 2008/2009 and updated on activities that had taken place during 2007/2008.

Each year the Panel received a report on the Member development activity which had taken place. To date there had been 45 sessions in total, of which 33 had been internal and 9 external and there had been 297 individual attendances in total. This compared to 30 events in the previous year, of which 14 were in house and there had been a total of 123 attendances. The increase was largely accounted for by this being an induction year for new Councillors elected in May 2007. The pattern of attendance at development events was detailed in the report along with comparison data from the previous 2 years.

In January 2008, each Councillor was sent a copy of the Member Development Plan, accompanying Core Skills Guidance and the Job Descriptions relating to the roles they held. The paperwork was accompanied by an offer that the Member could have a meeting with either an experienced Councillor or Senior Officer to work through their development plan. To date, the response rate in returning the forms had been low and it was considered that it was too early to draw any strong conclusions on development needs. Alongside the Member Development Plans a survey was circulated to establish

whether the current default time for training sessions was still appropriate. Also for those Councillors newly elected in May 2007 there was a second survey form on the 'officer contact scheme' which was introduced for the first time after the May 2007 elections. In summary, each new Councillor was allocated a Senior Officer to act as a liaison point helping them to navigate their way through the organisation in the first few months of their new role. Again the limited number of returns to date meant that no conclusions could yet be drawn.

In November 2005, the Panel brought together the Council's Policy on Member Development and this was attached as Appendix 1 to the Report. The Policy recognised that in any particular year the programme would be a mix of the recurring developing needs of particular committees, national and local priorities and the top collective development needs identified by Councillors. Although the return rates had been low, there already seemed to be a broad consensus that there needed to be development activities associated with community leadership and listening, questioning and probing skills.

The Panel held a wide ranging discussion that considered:-

- (1) trying to ensure improved attendance at training/development events;
- (2) holding events in Haverhill;
- (3) maintaining records on Members' attendance at development events; and
- (4) Members maintaining a training portfolio that related to attendance at all development events, including those provided by organisations other than the Borough Council, such as their employer.

RESOLVED:- That

- (1) the development activity provided for in the current year and the pattern of attendance be noted;
- (2) a draft programme for 2008/2009 be developed for presentation at the next meeting; and
- (3) a report be presented to the next meeting on the options for maintaining records on individual Members' training/development portfolio.

(Councillors Chappell, Hale and Mrs Levack arrived during the discussion on this item.)

38. Speaking Arrangement for Ward Members at Development Control Committee

The Panel considered Report Y549 (previously circulated) which sought the Panel's consideration as to speaking rights at the Development Control Committee.

On 24 July 2004, the Council requested that the Democratic Renewal Panel consider the apparent inequity that a Councillor, as a local Ward Member, could address the Development Control Committee for up to 3 minutes only whereas a Councillor who sat on the Committee could take part in the full debate. In summary, the Panel determined to maintain the status quo, however, this issue had been raised again and it was considered appropriate that it needed to be further considered by the Panel.

The Report outlined the speaking arrangements for the other District/Borough Councils within Suffolk and also the options available to the Panel.

The Panel considered both the role of the Ward Member who does not sit on the Development Control Committee and the role of the Ward Member who is a member of the Committee. It was recognised that a Ward Member on the Committee had a duty to represent his/her constituents but also to look at the 'whole picture' from the planning perspective.

After considering various options, the Panel concluded that a Ward Member, whether a member of the Committee or not, should address the Committee on Ward issues in the specific allocated slot of up to 3 minutes and this to be done at the same time as the other 'public speakers'. Ward Members not on the Committee should only be allocated this 3 minute time allocation. Ward Members on the Committee should be allowed to take part in the debate by the Committee provided they confined their comments on general planning matters only and not raise 'Ward Member issues'.

The Panel also considered other issues associated with public speaking, such as the arrangements when there was more than one Ward Member or an adjacent Ward Member wishing to speak. As these were infrequent occurrences, the Panel decided that any recommendation about procedure should be made at the time by the Chairman of the Committee rather than trying to cover every eventuality in advance.

RESOLVED:-

That the Development Control Committee be requested to consider the following changes to its current public speaking procedures:-

- (1) that Ward Members on the Committee address the Committee on Ward issues for up to 3 minutes, in the specific slot for Ward Members during the time allocated for public speaking;
- (2) Ward Members who sit on the Committee also be permitted to take part in the debate provided that they confine their comments to planning issues only and do not raise Ward specific matters; and
- (3) any 'public speaking' issues not covered by the procedures be determined by the Committee on the recommendation of the Chairman of the Committee.

39. Representation on Outside Bodies: Annual Report

The Panel considered Report Y550 (previously circulated) which sought approval for the Annual Report form and accompanying documentation to be sent to all appropriate Members in order that an Annual Report could be prepared and presented to full Council.

On 29 November 2007, the Panel considered the requirements to produce an Annual Report for 2006/2007, and the recommendations were approved by the Council on 11 December 2007. Council determined that the Annual Report form should be subject to review and that the Panel also consider further reporting arrangements. Subsequent to the meeting of the Council the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel had reviewed the Annual Report form. Attached as Appendix A to the Report was a list of reports that should be received in the 2007/2008 reporting year. Appendix B was the amended Annual Report form to be sent to the representatives on outside bodies and Appendix C was a covering letter to be sent to all representatives on outside bodies accompanying the Annual Report form.



RECOMMENDED:-

That the Annual Report form attached as Appendix B to Report Y550, and the accompanying letter attached as Appendix C to Report Y550 be sent to representatives on outside bodies as detailed in Appendix A to Report Y550.

(Councillor Mrs Levack left the meeting during the consideration of this item.)

40. Local Standards Assessment: Changes to Constitution

(Councillor Oliver declared a personal interest as the Vice-Chairman of Suffolk County Council's Standards Committee and remained within the meeting for the consideration of this item.)

The Panel considered a narrative item which sought approval to the amendment to the Constitution to determine the operation of the Standards Committee.

Part 10 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 contained changes to the current system of reporting and investigating complaints against Councillors for alleged breach of the Code of Conduct. The main effect of the provisions, which were expected to come into effect on 1 April 2008, were to give Standards Committees the task of receiving and assessing complaints to decide whether and if so how they should be further investigated. In the knowledge that the changes were imminent, Article 9 of the Constitution had been amended to provide that one of the Standards Committee's functions would be 'dealing with the filtering of complaints' and also to require the Committee to be chaired by an independent member.



RECOMMENDED:- That

(1) Article 9, paragraph 9.3.1 (h) be amended to read:

"To carry out all the powers and duties contained in Part 10 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and regulations made thereunder including but not limited to local assessment of complaints and the making of returns to the Standards Board"; and

(2) Responsibility for Council Functions

Section C. Standards Committee be deleted.

(3) Scheme of Delegation of Officers: Head of Legal and Democratic Services

paragraph F3 (a) (1) 1. of the scheme of delegation, after "Local Government Act 2000" there be inserted "and Part 10 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007".

41. Date of Next Meeting

It was confirmed that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 18 March 2008 at 5.30 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.26 pm.

**P S FARMER
CHAIRMAN**