

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL PANEL

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 12 February 2009 at 5.30 pm
in the Committee Room, Borough Offices, Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds**

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

BY INVITATION: Councillor Ray (Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development)

31. Substitutes

The Panel was advised of the following substitution:-

Councillor Rout substituting for Councillor Hale.

32. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hale.

33. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. Declarations of Interests

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

35. Community Governance Review: Hepworth Parish Council

The Panel considered Report Z533 (previously circulated) which sought approval for the size of Hepworth Parish Council to be increased by one member to comprise eight Parish Councillors and that the increase come into effect at the next ordinary elections of the Parish Council.

On 17 November 2008 the Panel considered a request from Hepworth Parish Council for an increase in size by one Councillor. The report outlined the process to be followed and the Panel made recommendations to Council which resulted in the Community Governance Review of the size of Hepworth Parish Council being instigated to ascertain the views of local people and interested parties on the request for an increase. As a result of this decision, consultation was undertaken with:-

- (1) each household in Hepworth Parish;
- (2) Parish, Borough and County Councillors;
- (3) Suffolk County Council;
- (4) Suffolk Association of Local Councils; and
- (5) the local constituency offices of political parties.

A copy of the letter and briefing sheet circulated to householders explaining the review process and options being consulted on were attached as Appendix 1.

In response to the consultation, three consultees acknowledged receipt of the consultation document but passed no comment on the options outlined. Two other responses were received, both in favour of the increase in Council size.

During the discussion the Panel was informed that:-

- (1) no more responses to the consultation had been received since the compilation of the report; and
- (2) the cost of consultation, excluding officer time, was the cost of posting out the letters to the consultees.

The Panel concluded that as the case for an increase had been made by the Parish Council and none of the respondents had opposed it that the membership of Hepworth Parish Council be increased by one to eight Parish Councillors.

The Panel was informed that the increase in membership would normally take place at the next 'ordinary parish elections', and not at by-elections. Therefore, this increase would come into effect for the elections scheduled for May 2011.



RECOMMENDED:- That

- (1) ***having conducted a Community Governance Review of the size of Hepworth Parish Council in accordance with the terms of reference agreed by Council on 9 December 2008, the size of Hepworth Parish Council be increased by one to comprise eight parish councillors; and***
- (2) ***this increase come into effect at the next ordinary elections of the parish council.***

(Councillor Clifton-Brown arrived during the consideration of this item.)

36. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill.

The Panel received and noted a narrative item, supported by Paper Z534 (previously circulated), which comprised a briefing note outlining the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, several aspects of which were of relevance to the remit of the Panel.

The Panel noted that the Government intended to publish additional guidance in relation to several of the provisions of this bill. The briefing note was brought to the Panel for information so that the Panel was aware of its existence and that issues of relevance would be brought back to the Panel when further details were known or when changes to the Council's Constitution or democratic practices were required.

The White Paper '*Communities in Control: Real people, real power*', published in July 2008, set out the Government's proposals for empowering local communities. These proposals had been developed into two pieces of legislation:-

- (1) the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill; and
- (2) the forthcoming Community Empowerment Bill, which had not yet been published.

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill covered the following areas:-

Part 1: duties relating to the promotion of democracy, provisions concerning local authority petitions and an extension of the duty to inform, consult and involve;

Part 2: provisions relating to governance and audit;

Part 3: local government boundary and electoral change;

Part 4: local authority economic assessments;

Part 5: regional strategy;

Part 6: Economic Prosperity Boards and Combined Authorities;

Part 7: Multi-Area Agreements; and

Part 8: construction contracts (not covered in this briefing note).

37. Changing Council Governance Arrangements: Government Consultation Paper

The Panel considered Report Z535 (previously circulated) which sought approval for a response to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on a number of policy commitments contained within the Government White Paper '*Communities in Control: Real people, real power*'. This Government White Paper had the stated aim of modernising the democratic system and increasing public participation.

The DCLG was now consulting on a number of policy commitments and a copy of the White Paper was attached as Appendix A. It focused on proposals to make it easier for people to demand referendums to move to a new form of governance, for example to have a directly elected mayor. Responses were due back to DCLG by 13 March 2009.

The report detailed proposed responses to each question and the Panel considered in detail each question and response, and endorsed the proposed responses.



RECOMMENDED:-

That the responses to the Department of Communities and Local Government Consultation document, 'Communities in control: Real people, real power', as detailed in Section 2 of Report Z535, be approved;

38. Member Development: Request from Bury St Edmunds Town Council

(Councillors Farmer, Oliver, Rout and Mrs Warby declared personal interests as Members of Bury St Edmunds Town Council and remained within the meeting for the consideration of this item.)

The Panel considered a narrative item which contained a request from Bury St Edmunds Town Council that consideration be given to extending attendance at St Edmundsbury Member Development events to Members of the Town Council.

The Panel recognised that there were clearly some types of development event to which it would not be appropriate to extend an invitation beyond Members of the Borough Council. There were other events, particularly skill based workshops, that

could easily be opened up more widely if there was space available. It was also recognised that an appropriate proportion of the costs of staging the event, where costs were incurred, could then be recharged to attendees from other councils. The Panel also determined that it was appropriate that invitations, to appropriate events, be extended to other town and parish councils within St Edmundsbury, so enabling them to have the opportunity to take up any places.

During the discussion consideration was given to extending invitations to attend development events to voluntary organisations. However it was concluded that this would only rarely occur in relation to very specific events. It was also noted that offering places at events to town and parish councils within St Edmundsbury would create additional administration for officers of the Borough Council. It was concluded that if this were done by 'electronic means' then once set up the amount of administration would be acceptable.



RECOMMENDED:- That

- (1) spare capacity at appropriate Member Development events be made available to Members of Bury St Edmunds Town Council and other town/parish councils on payment of a recharge for any costs incurred; and***
- (2) where there is any doubt as to the appropriateness of extending such an invitation, officers consult with the Chairman of the Democratic Renewal Panel and the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development.***

(Councillor Cox wished it be recorded that he voted against the specific inclusion of reference to Bury St Edmunds Town Council in recommendation (1))

39. Dates of Future Meetings

It was agreed that meetings would be held on:-

Thursday 19 March; and
Tuesday 19 May 2009.

Both meetings to commence at 5.30 pm.

The meeting concluded at 5.59 pm.

**P S FARMER
CHAIRMAN**