

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL PANEL

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 10 September 2009 at 5.30 pm
in Room GFR12, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

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

10. Substitute

The following substitution was declared:-

Councillor Rout substituting for Councillor Cox.

11. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bradbury, Cox and Oliver.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(Councillor Rout arrived during the discussion of this item.)

13. Declarations of Interests

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

14. Strengthening Local Democracy: Consultation Response

The Panel considered Report A197 (previously circulated) which sought approval for the response to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Consultation Paper 'Strengthening Local Democracy'.

The Consultation Paper raised a series of questions about various aspects of local democracy and these were set out in Appendix A of the report along with officers' suggested responses for the Panel's consideration. The closing date for views to be submitted was 3 October 2009.

Members commented that the issues raised in relation to climate change did not appear to relate well to the general topic of the consultation but, nonetheless, it was agreed that the opportunity should be taken to respond.



RECOMMENDED:-

That the response to the strengthening Local Democracy Consultation Paper, attached in Appendix A of Report A187, be approved.

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

15. Member Development: Update

The Panel considered Report A198 (previously circulated) which set out updates on:-

- (i) the Member Development Programme for the remainder of the municipal year (attached as Appendix 1 to the report);
- (ii) support given for Member Development activity within the Council since May 2007 (attached as Appendix 2). This information had been provided for an 18 month informal assessment carried out by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) in connection with Elected Member Development Charter status; and
- (iii) the Action Plan adopted in July 2007 (attached as Appendix 3) which sought to maintain the award of the Elected Member Development Charter by EERA which was due to be reviewed in March 2010.

The Panel referred to the change of responsibilities of the Head of Strategy and Performance whereby she would cease to be involved in Member Development activities and thanked her for her work over the past 6 years in this particular role. The Panel noted that in future support for the Member Development activity would be provided by the Legal and Democratic Services team. In relation to the Member Development Programme, the Panel accepted reasons why some of the planned events had not taken place on the dates indicated. The Panel also noted reviewed performance against the Action Plan for the elected Member Development Charter status and that the authority appeared to be on course.

The Panel agreed the Member Development Record folder issued in August 2009 had been worthwhile and expressed the hope that Members would find it useful. The hope was also expressed that sessions arranged under the Member Development Programme for the remainder of the municipal year would be well attended.

When considering the 2009/2010 Member Development Programme the Panel considered that there were advantages in inviting members from other local authorities and that this should be done when appropriate.



RECOMMENDED:- That

- (1) the revised programme for the remainder of the year, attached as Appendix 1 to Report A198, be approved; and***
 - (a) Councillors from Forest Heath District Council or any other appropriate authority be invited to attend Member Development Activities when relevant; and***
 - (b) 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.***

16. Members Attendance Statistics: Publication

The Panel considered a narrative item that sought consideration as to whether the Members' Attendance Statistics should be published alongside Payments to Councillors in *Community Spirit*.

On 29 June 2009 during the discussion at full Council on the Statement of Accounts for 2008/2009 it had been agreed that the Democratic Renewal Panel give consideration of whether the Members' Attendance Statistics should be published along with the Payments to Councillors in *Community Spirit*, the Council's newspaper.

The last set of statistics which had been presented to the Panel on 16 June 2009 (Paper A42 refers) were attached for reference purposes.

There was a consensus amongst the Panel that as the Attendance Statistics only related to the formal meetings of the Council they did not indicate a true record of the work done by Councillors. They did not take account of, for example, informal meetings of working groups, training and briefing sessions and other meetings involving Councillors which were arranged by the Council. It was also recognised that Members attended meetings of outside bodies as representatives of the Council and they also attended meetings of Parish Councils and Residents' Associations etc on an individual basis.

It was concluded that it would be extremely difficult to quantify the extent of this added involvement so as to be able to present more accurate information. The statistics in their present format reflecting attendances at formal meetings were, in any event, available on the Council's website.



RECOMMENDED:-

That Members' Attendance Statistics be not published in Community Spirit as they are not a true reflection of work undertaken by Councillors.

17. Amendments to the Constitution

The Panel considered Report A199 (previously circulated) which sought approval to changes to the Constitution arising from the Staff and management restructuring and the need to clarify financial management issues. On 29 July 2009 the Cabinet endorsed a staff and management restructure. The new structure had necessitated a significant rearrangement of the Constitution, although this had not changed the basic delegations to officers. Therefore, delegated authority was sought to amend the Constitution.

The report also noted that following a recent internal audit report, recommendations had been made to bring the Council's financial delegations into line with best practice according to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CPPFA) by adding a section to the Constitution specifying the responsibilities, reporting lines and delegations for financial management. This was attached as Appendix A to the report. It was proposed to include this in Part 3 of the Constitution under Responsibility for Functions, Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

Officers advised of amendments to Appendix A which solely related to the correction of names being shown under Budget Manager headings.



RECOMMENDED:- That

(1) the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be given delegated authority to amend the Constitution as a result of the staff and management restructure; and

(2) Appendix A, as amended, attached to Report A199 be approved for inclusion under Part 3, Responsibility of Functions, Section B of Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

18. Dates of Next Meetings

The Panel confirmed the following meeting dates:-

19 November 2009;
4 February 2010; and
11 March 2010.

All meeting dates were Thursdays and meetings to commence at 5.30 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.00 pm.

**P S FARMER
CHAIRMAN**