

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL
DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL WORKING PARTY
(Formerly the Democratic Renewal Panel)

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 9 June 2011 at 5.00 pm
in Room GFR12, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs P A Warby (Chairman)
Councillors Beckwith (substituting for Redhead), Cox, Farmer,
Mrs Levack, Stevens (substituting for Clifton-Brown), and
Thorndyke

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

1. Substitutes

The Committee Services Manager informed the Working Party that Councillor Beckwith had been appointed as the substitute Member for the Independent Group.

The Working Party was informed of the following substitutions:-

Councillor Beckwith substituting for Councillor Redhead; and
Councillor Stevens substituting for Councillor Clifton-Brown.

2. Election of Chairman

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Mrs P A Warby be elected Chairman of this
Working Party.

3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor J Thorndyke be elected Vice-Chairman of this
Working Party.

4. Apology for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clifton-Brown and
Redhead.

5. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2011 were confirmed as a
correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. Declarations of Interests

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

7. Member Development: Update

The Working Party considered Report C12 (previously circulated) which sought approval for a revised Member Development Policy and also provided information on progress with the Member Development Charter Action Plan and details of the Member Development budget for 2010/2011.

On 17 February 2011 the Working Party discussed the 12 recommendations arising from the Council's assessment for the Member Development Charter. The first three recommendations were considered essential in order for the Council to re-achieve Charter Status, and the remaining actions, whilst desirable, were not essential. The Working Party selected an additional five items from these recommended actions which it was felt would add value to the Council's Member Development offer and, therefore, these were added to the Action Plan. Report C12 detailed the final Action Plan together with progress to date in achieving each of the eight actions.

In considering the progress against the Action Plan it was agreed that the Training Needs Analysis form should include reference to where Members received training provided by other organisations such as their employer. It was also considered appropriate that the Training Needs Analysis form should provide the opportunity for Members to indicate why they did not wish to undertake some particular training.

The Working Party then considered the revisions to the Member Development Policy, which was attached as Appendix B to the report. During the discussion it was agreed that Members must be encouraged to complete the Training Needs Analysis forms and it was agreed that Members should be given the opportunity to complete these forms electronically. It was also agreed that Members should be fully aware that for development activities, reimbursement of travel expenses and child minding/carers costs were available.

Appendix C contained details of expenditure in respect of the Member Development budgets for 2010/2011. There was a wide ranging discussion which included:-

- (1) more information on the costs associated with the Member Development Charter;
- (2) that the details contained within Appendix C did not include reference to where courses were paid for by other organisations and also did not record training activities provided in-house for which there was no direct cost;
- (3) the process for when Members received details of external courses and were interested in attending. It was agreed that the details should be forwarded to the Scrutiny Manager;
- (4) a system for Members to provide feedback from the courses that they attended; and
- (5) that the Council did not operate a facility whereby an underspend in a specific financial year was carried over to the following financial year.

In response to a question, the Working Party was informed that the assessors for the East of England Local Government Association Charter considered that the Borough Council's training budget was more than adequate for the size of the local authority.

RESOLVED:- That

(a) **Training Needs Analysis Form**

The Training Needs Analysis Form be amended to include:-

- (1) a facility to record training undertaken but not provided by the Borough Council; and
- (2) the facility to record reasons for not wishing to attend specific training;

(b) **Member Development Activity Evaluation Form**

The form to be available for completion electronically.



RECOMMENDED:- That

Member Development Policy

The Member Development Policy, attached as Appendix B to Report C12, be approved.

8. Payment of Members' Travel Expenses

The Working Party considered Report C13 (previously circulated) which sought approval for the amendment to the system for paying Members' travel expenses.

On 19 May 2011, full Council determined that the Working Party should consider proposed amendments to the payment of Members' travel and ancillary expenses. The process for claiming of Members' expenses had been reviewed to improve the efficiency and accuracy of payments to Members. The current system incorporated that where there was an official attendance sheet for Council meetings which were held at West Suffolk House and the Member signed the appropriate box, travel expenses were paid automatically. This assumed that the Member travelled independently to the meeting by car from their home. It was then necessary for a member of the Payroll Section to analyse the attendance sheets and make monthly transfer of travel details in order to generate payments. This transfer and the resultant 'double checking' meant that the Payroll Section spent a considerable amount of time in respect of paying these expenses. In addition, the Payroll Section had to generate a separate detailed pay slip to inform Members of the journeys included in their payment. It was recognised that there was the chance of human error in transferring data from a collection of papers for each Member.

It was proposed that Members complete one travel claim, preferably monthly but on a regular basis, to claim expenses due. It was considered that this was a sound process from an audit point of view and that the Member would be responsible for the accuracy of the claim. There was also an opportunity for the Council to claim back from the Inland Revenue the VAT element paid for fuel. However, Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs required Members to provide fuel receipts where possible to support the expense payments. The receipt enabled the VAT to be reclaimed by the Borough Council. To instigate a change in the payment of Members' expenses it was necessary for Council to approve a change in the Constitution.

There was a wide ranging discussion. Councillor Cox considered the current system to be perfectly adequate and was against any change. However, most of the Working Party recognised that there was a need to improve the efficiency of the current payment system of travel expenses to Members and there was a consensus that Members should be responsible for their travel claims and not the Payroll Section.

During the discussion the Human Resources Manager agreed:-

- (1) to examine the possibility of completing travel claims on-line;
- (2) that travel claims did not need to be completed monthly but should be completed on a regular basis;
- (3) to examine the format of the claim forms in order to make them more relevant to Members; and
- (4) that it was not essential for Members to submit VAT receipts and photocopies would be acceptable.

In response to a question the Working Party was informed that the new system would come into operation soon after it had been approved by full Council.



RECOMMENDED:- That

- (1) the proposed process for the payment of Members' travel expenses as outlined in Report C13 be approved; and**
- (2) that new paragraph 12.2, detailed in paragraph 5.2 of Report C13, replace paragraphs 12.2 and 12.3 in Part 6, Members' Allowances Scheme, in the Constitution.**

(Councillor Cox wished it be recorded that he was totally against this recommendation.)

9. Members' Attendance Statistics

The Working Party received and noted Report C14 (previously circulated) which presented the Members' attendance statistics for 2010/2011.

Full Council had approved the format and publication requirements associated with Members' attendance statistics. The publication of the statistics was accompanied by a list of activities undertaken by Councillors as recorded in the statistics and all those activities undertaken by Councillors carrying out their roles but which were not included in the statistics, these were detailed in Appendix A to the report.

An annual report was presented to the relevant meeting of the Working Party and covered the period 1 April to 31 March each year. The statistics were listed in alphabetical order of the name of the Councillor.

The Working Party held a wide ranging discussion and recognised the limitations of the statistics and some suggestions were considered in amending the collection data. However, there was a consensus that no further changes were required to the current system and presentation of the statistics.

10. Dates of Next Meetings

The Working Party confirmed the following meeting dates:-

8 September 2011;
24 November 2011;
9 February 2012; and
26 April 2012.

All dates were Thursdays and meetings to commence at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.13 pm.

**MRS P A WARBY
CHAIRMAN**