

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL
DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 6 December 2012
at 5.00 pm
in Room GFR12, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs P A Warby (Chairman)
Councillors Chung, Farmer, Redhead and Thorndyke

BY INVITATION: Councillor Cox

11. Substitutes

No substitutions were declared.

12. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Clifton-Brown.

At this point in the agenda the Chairman welcomed Councillor Chung, who had been appointed to the vacancy on this Working Party.

13. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. Declarations of Interests

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

15. Member Development: Update

The Working Party considered Report D212 (previously circulated) which updated Members on a number of issues related to Member Development, and sought their views.

As mentioned at the last meeting of the Working Party, a programme of training events had been developed reflecting the areas identified through the Training Needs Analysis and Corporate Priorities. Appendix A to the report set out a diary of events planned to date for the remainder of the 2012/2013 Member Development Programme.

The Human Resources Support Advisor (Learning and Development) advised Members that attendance at events was recorded on the organisation database iTrent. Attached at Appendix B1 to the report was a spreadsheet showing the individuals who had attended events since June 2012. Appendix B2 showed an example report for an individual. These reports could be created for all Members at the end of the learning/financial year.

Regarding Appendix B1, Members asked that some details, such as payroll number and organisation, be removed from future reports, and that

details of Members of Forest Heath District Council attending events, and officer attendance, not be included, as the Working Party needed to concentrate on Borough Councillor attendance. Members also pointed out that the Licensing training arranged by the Specialist Lead Officer - Licensing was not included on the report, and this would be included in future reports.

Regarding Appendix B2, Members felt that these could be useful, and asked that reports be sent to individual Members at the end of April each year.

Appendix B3 provided the combined results of the course evaluation forms which had been completed for 5 events in September and October 2012. This showed that the most highly rated sessions had been the visit to Anglia Revenues Partnership and the session on Data Protection and Freedom of Information. The sessions scoring lowest were Licensing and Emergency Planning. Members agreed that the Emergency Planning session had relied too heavily on powerpoint presentations, and had been largely irrelevant to the Borough Council audience, with too much emphasis on the American air base. These comments would be fed back to the County Council officer who led the session. Whilst discussing Appendix B3 the Human Resources Support Advisor (Learning and Development) stated that many evaluation forms were taken away and not filled in, and Members felt that this may be because if Members wished to include negative comments, they would prefer the forms to be anonymous. The form would therefore be amended to include the word "optional" after "Name".

Appendix C to the report set out the proposed terms of reference for Forest Heath's informal Joint Member Development Group, to which Councillors Thorndyke and Mrs P Warby had been nominated to join at the last meeting of the Working Party. Forest Heath did not have a formal Working Party to guide its Member Development offer, and this informal working group was the way it engaged its Members in such issues as planning training and carrying out the annual Training Needs Analysis. The first meeting of this informal group would be scheduled in the New Year. A minor typographical error in the terms of reference would be amended.

There were two main budgets which were used to pay for Member Development activity. A budget of £8,100 was used for the Member Development Programme, including funding externally sourced sessions which were delivered in-house, places on sessions offered by other councils or organisations, the Member Development Charter and other costs. A separate budget of £2,900 paid for attendance at external conferences by individual Members. In addition, there was £1,500 available for travel and subsistence payments. The current position of the two main budgets for 2012/2013 was detailed in Appendix C to the report. The main £8,100 budget was currently showing £338.50 expenditure to date, due to the majority of training events this year having been delivered by key officers internally. However, other planned events in the 2012/13 Member Development programme would be commissioned externally, including an estimate of £300 for speed reading dependant on attendance, £1,000 for licensing training based on the previous year, and £1,600 for two further external sessions yet to be commissioned. The £2,900 conference budget was shown at 73% spent at 9 months, with the majority of the expected annual conferences being accounted for.

Turning to the conference expenditure budget, Members were concerned that they never received feedback or shared learning from the attendees of these conferences. Earlier in the year, as part of the Member

Development Charter Action Plan, the Working Party had created a form to be used by the attendees of external conferences and training courses to feed back to other Members and share the learning. Members asked that the form be circulated to attendees of external conferences and training courses, and that they be requested to share details of the session attended via the Members' Bulletin, and to the Working Party.

Councillor Cox asked why, when the maximum overnight subsistence rate was £80, accommodation costs were shown on the budget of £372.20 for the 3 nights of the LGA Annual Conference, and £300 for the 3 nights of the LGA Rural Annual Conference. The Democratic Services Manager (Interim) advised Councillor Cox that, as per information already provided to him outside of the meeting, the cost of accommodation for these two annual conferences, attended by the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste Management respectively for several years, was not claimed back by the individual Members, but paid by the Head of Service alongside the Conference Fees. The reason for this was that, on occasion, it was important in order to be able to effectively carry out business, to take part in networking and to cut down on travel time that at Member stay in a hotel specifically associated with a particular conference.

Councillor Cox asked where in the Constitution this authority could be found, and was advised that this level of delegation would be too minor to have its own line in the Constitution, but that all Heads of Service were authorised to use their resources in the most effective way to meet the Council's priorities. For the sake of clarity, however, the Working Party requested a report to its next meeting setting out the justification for the authorisations.

RESOLVED: - That

- (1) future versions of Appendix B1 to Report D212, Course Attendance Analysis by Activity, show only Borough Councillor attendance, and that unnecessary information on the report, such as payroll numbers, not be included;
- (2) personal Councillor learning records, as shown in the example at Appendix B2 to Report D212, be sent to each individual Member at the end of April each year;
- (3) the Course Evaluation Sheet include the word "optional" after the word "Name";
- (4) the External Event Evaluation Form be circulated to all Members attending external conferences or training courses, and that they be requested to provide feedback on the event attended via the Members' Bulletin, and to the Working Party;
- (5) a report be brought to the next meeting of the Working Party setting out the reasoning behind the authorisation of the expenditure of more than the £80 per night maximum for overnight accommodation shown in the Members' Allowances Scheme.

16. The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

The Working Party considered Report D213 (previously circulated) which outlined the new provisions introduced by the above Regulations, highlighted the changes which would be required to some of the Council's Cabinet processes and the Constitution, and sought authority to make the necessary changes to the Constitution.

The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 had come into force on 10 September 2012, and made changes to the Regulations which governed meetings of the Executive (Cabinet), and how executive decisions were recorded. There had been no consultation or information on the content of the Regulations prior to their publication, and this had resulted in a situation where there was still confusion over one or two of the Regulations, for which it was hoped that separate guidance would be forthcoming.

The Working Party considered a report which took each of the key elements of the Regulations in turn and advised Members of changes which had been made to the executive decision making process as a result, and requested delegated authority to make the necessary changes to the Constitution.

Some of the changes implemented as a result of the Regulations included: the replacement of the Forward Plan with a Decisions Plan giving 28 days' notice of the taking of any Key Decision or the discussion of any issue by the Cabinet in private; changes to Cabinet agendas to more clearly set out the reasons for part of a meeting being held in private; changes to the Decisions Notice; a requirement for executive decisions taken by officers to be recorded; and changes to the existing general urgency and special urgency provisions.

The Working Party noted that the changes had been required as a result of the coming into force of the Regulations, and that it would follow that various elements of the Constitution would need to be amended to make provision for the new Regulations.



RECOMMENDED:-

That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be given delegated authority to make any necessary changes to the Council's Constitution identified as a result of the coming into force of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

17. Dates of Future Meetings

The Working Party was reminded of the following agreed meeting dates:-

14 February 2013; and
2 May 2013.

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

The meeting concluded at 5.45 pm.

CHAIRMAN