

**ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL WORKING PARTY**

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 14 February 2013  
at 5.00 pm  
in Room GFR12, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

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

BY INVITATION: Councillor Ray (Portfolio Holder for Performance and  
Resources)  
Councillor Cox

**18. Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

**19. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Levack.

**20. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**21. Declarations of Interests**

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

**22. Amendment to the Schedule of Polling Places**

The Schedule of Polling Places was last amended and approved by full Council on 27 September 2011 (report C116 and Council minute 47(D)(1) September 2011 referred).

The Electoral Services Manager advised Members of a proposal to amend the Schedule of Polling Places to allow electors in Sapiston Parish to poll in Honington Parish (Village Ward) when required. As the parishes are adjacent to each other, this would not inconvenience voters.

The addition to the Schedule was provided in a narrative on the agenda, and Members supported the recommendation.



***RECOMMENDED:-***

***That the Schedule of Polling Places be amended to allow electors in Sapiston Parish to poll in Honington Parish (Village Ward) when required.***

### **23. Member Development: Update**

The Working Party considered Report D292 (previously circulated) which updated Members on a number of issues related to Member Development, and sought their views.

The Learning and Development Manager provided details of events which had been delivered to date at Appendix A, attendance statistics for these events at Appendix B, and evaluation statistics at Appendix C. The appendices showed an average attendance at events of 10 Members from St Edmundsbury, and a steady evaluation score of around 80% for the last two events. Members asked that in future, Appendix B also show attendance by Members of Forest Heath District Council (FHDC), and that Appendix C show evaluation statistics both combined with FHDC, and separately for St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC). Members also pointed out a couple of anomalies between the two appendices which officers would correct for the next versions.

Members noticed that on occasion training sessions had been cancelled, and were advised that this was due to low numbers advising officers that they intended to attend. Members advised that they did not always know until much closer to a date whether they would be able to attend, but acknowledged that it would help officers if they indicated that they would do their best to attend a particular session. Officers were therefore asked to put a reminder in the next Member Development Bulletin update, that Members should indicate to officers if they were hoping to attend a particular training session.

It would shortly be time to commence commissioning of a programme of events for 2013/14, and to this avail it was proposed that a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) form, attached as Appendix D to the report, be circulated to all Members on 25 February 2013, to be returned by 29 March 2013. At the same time, each Member would be sent an individual learning record setting out the training events they had attended over the past year. Following analysis of the forms (which may be amended slightly before being circulated to include further potential events), a selection of options for the programme for 2013/14 would be brought to the Working Party.

The Learning and Development Manager gave a verbal update on the first meeting of the informal Joint Member Development Group, which had met that morning, to which Councillors Thorndyke and Mrs Warby had been appointed by 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.

At that meeting, it had been agreed that, rather than six Members from FHDC and two from SEBC, this informal group should comprise four Members from each of the two councils. The Working Party was therefore asked to nominate a further two Members to the Group. During the discussion it was suggested that perhaps one of those Members should be a non-Conservative Member, and another should perhaps be a Cabinet Member. The Working Party gave the Chairman authority to discuss the Membership of the Joint Group with Group Leaders and report back to the Working Party.

The Learning and Development Manager then gave an update on the budgets for Member Development. 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 and training activities by individual Members. The current position of the two main budgets for 2012/2013 was detailed in Appendix E to the report. The main £8,100 budget was currently showing £545.65 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 £400 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 with less than a quarter of the financial year remaining, with the majority of the expected annual conferences being accounted for.

Turning to the conference expenditure budget, Members asked for an explanation as to how it was decided which Members were authorised to attend a conference. The Learning and Development Manager advised that, where Forest Heath District Council was concerned, it was delegated to her as the budget holder to consider any requests from Members, and to make the decision based on how that Member felt a particular conference or training event would contribute to their knowledge and competencies. For St Edmundsbury the situation was informal. Generally there were very few conferences or training events outside of the Member Development Programme each year, and most of these were repeated annually. On the rare occasions where a request was received by a Member to attend an event, there was an informal process in place whereby if the cost was less than £100 the Learning and Development Manager would take the decision, and where it was over £100 the Leader of the Council would take the decision.

Members felt that this anomaly should be clarified, and asked that the informal Joint Member Development Group be asked to draw up a protocol for the approval of individual Members attending conferences and training events outside the main Member Development Programme, and to bring those proposals through the relevant body at each Council, which for St Edmundsbury would be the Working Party. Members felt that the Forest Heath system, whereby the officer with responsibility for Member Development made the decision, was sensible and gave equal access to all and equality of judgement.

RESOLVED: - That

- (1) future versions of Appendix B to Report D292, Course Attendance Analysis by Activity, also show the attendance of Members of Forest Heath District Council, and that future versions of Appendix C to Report D292, Member Training Evaluation, show combined scores from both Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councillors, and also show separately the scores from St Edmundsbury Borough Councillors;
- (2) a reminder be placed in the next Member Development Bulletin update, that Members should indicate to officers if they were hoping to attend a particular training session;

- (3) the Training Needs Analysis form, as set out at Appendix D to Report D292, be circulated to all Members on 25 February 2013, and that officers be authorised to add further training options to the form before circulation;
- (4) the Chairman be authorised to discuss with Group Leaders the appointment of a further two Members to the informal Joint Member Development Group, and to bring back the results of that discussion to a future meeting of the Working Party; and
- (5) the informal Joint Member Development Group be asked to draw up a protocol for the approval of individual Members attending conferences and training events outside the main Member Development Programme, and to bring those proposals through the relevant body at each Council, which for St Edmundsbury would be the Democratic Renewal Working Party.

#### **24. Members' Overnight Subsistence**

The Working Party considered Report D293 (previously circulated) which had been requested at the last meeting of the Working Party, and which aimed to clarify the circumstances in which a variation from the limit for overnight subsistence set out in the Members' Allowances Scheme could be authorised.

For many years senior Councillors had attended national conferences and events which included presentations, networking and workshops, over 2 to 3 days, from the morning through into the evening each day. It was therefore practical, in the interests of the conference attendee being able to do business effectively, for the Member to stay at a hotel associated with the Conference, rather than having to drive to and from an alternative, albeit possibly cheaper hotel, further away, where valuable networking opportunities would be lost. On these occasions the full overnight cost of the accommodation had been met from the relevant service budget alongside the conference fee, ie the Member had not needed to pay for accommodation and claim it back through payroll.

Members had queried where the authorisation to make such payments in excess of the maximum shown in the Members' Allowances Scheme could be found in the Constitution, and had been advised that, whilst too minor an issue to warrant its own line in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, it would be covered under the standard financial authorities in the Constitution which required all Heads of Service to:

- prepare budgets on the basis of service priorities, within the overall context of the Cabinet's agreed priorities; and to
- utilise resources allocated, and further allocate resources, in the most efficient, effective and economic way.

In officers' opinion, the marginal extra cost was justified as being an efficient and effective way for the Member to obtain the maximum benefit and value from attendance at a conference. However, Members' point, that this was not specifically set out in the constitution, was acknowledged, and a

suitable addition to the Travel and Subsistence Schedule in the Members' Allowances Scheme was proposed.

Councillor Redhead felt that, as a specific nightly maximum amount was set out in the Constitution, then if this had been exceeded it should be paid back. Officers responded that the Members concerned had not paid the fees and then claimed them back, but that officers had booked the entire conference and accommodation fees together from the service budget, and the Members concerned would not have been aware of the cost of the accommodation element of the conference fee. Senior officers were entrusted to use their budgets in the most effective way in the overall context of the Council's priorities, and acted as safeguards for those budgets.

Councillor Farmer moved the recommendation with two minor amendments, which were seconded and approved.



**RECOMMENDED:-**

***That, for the sake of clarity, the sentence "the overnight subsistence allowance may be exceeded on the authorisation of a Head of Service, for example in order for a Member to stay in a hotel associated with a particular conference" be added to Schedule 4 of the Members' Allowances Scheme in the Council's Constitution.***

*(Councillor Ray left the meeting following the consideration of this item).*

## **25. Amendments to the Constitution**

The Working Party considered Report D294 (previously circulated) which requested authority to make relevant changes to the Constitution, to bring it up to date.

Each year the Constitution was updated to reflect the changes which had been agreed through full Council each year. Since the last review in February 2012, there had been a number of changes approved through full Council, including amendments as a result of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, and with regards to Standards etc, which needed to be incorporated into the Constitution. In working through the Constitution to make these amendments, several other inaccuracies had been spotted, such as references to old officer titles, changes to Council priorities etc. The report requested authority to make relevant changes to the Constitution to bring it up to date.

At the same time, delegated authority was sought to amend the Policy Framework, which had not been updated for many years, in order to clarify what policies and strategies should be approved through full Council, and the Corporate Communications Manager wished to amend the procedure rules on the recording of Council meetings in order to change the emphasis to be more positive and outlining what was allowed, rather than what was not allowed. These and the other proposed changes were set out in the table at Section 5 of the report.

The Democratic Services Manager (Interim) advised that it was intended to re-print the Constitution as a loose-leaf binder which could be

updated throughout the year as necessary, as soon as possible after the amendments had been approved through full Council. It was requested that Members be given the option of receiving a full copy of the revised Constitution once printed.



**RECOMMENDED:-**

***That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be given delegated authority to make the amendments to the Constitution outlined in Section 5 of Report D294, in order to remove inaccuracies.***

*(Councillor Farmer left the meeting during the consideration of this item).*

**26. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Working Party was reminded that the date of its next meeting had been set for Thursday 2 May 2013, at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.13 pm.

**CHAIRMAN**