

Minutes

Local Government Reform - Cabinet Sub Group

7th April 2008



Present:

Members	Present
Councillor J Abbott	Yes
Councillor Mrs J Beavis	Yes
Councillor G Butland	Yes
Councillor Dr R L Evans	Yes
Councillor M Gage	Yes
Councillor N McCrea	Apologies
Councillor J McKee	Yes

36 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

INFORMATION: There were no declarations of interest.

37 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 20th February 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38 **MATTERS ARISING**

INFORMATION: - The Head of Law and Governance advised there are minor amendments to update on the current stage of the Member Development Model, and the Member Services questionnaire is soon to be issued electronically to all Members. The Member Conference is still taking place on Saturday 7th June 2008, although it is the same day as Braintree Carnival and some Councillors may only be able to attend for part of the day.

Mrs Lowe referred to emerging policy, i.e. the new White Paper 'Community Empowerment', plus other guidance being available to the next meeting of the Sub Group on 3rd June 2008. Agenda items currently consist of

- Local Democracy Week
- 'Representing the Future' by Dame Jane Roberts – a discussion paper from the Commission of Local Councillors, containing 61 recommendations, and the
- Sustainable Communities Act

ACTION POINT: The Head of Law & Governance to circulate 'Representing the Future' paper to Sub Group Members.

39 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS – ONE YEAR ON

INFORMATION:- The Sub-Group considered the report on the work of the Task and Finish Groups, including feedback from Task and Finish Group Members, learning points and recommendations. Three of the four Groups had concluded their work and are at different stages with Council and Cabinet meetings –

- Refuse and Recycling Task and Finish Group, and Democratic Renewal Task and Finish Group to be received at Cabinet on 2nd June 2008, and
- BDC Allotments Task and Finish Group – Recommendations from the Portfolio Holder to be received at Cabinet at 7th July 2008.

All reports have received positive feedback from all Members when being presented to Council.

The fourth Group, the Rural Isolation Task Group, now has a dedicated officer, Cherie Root, and is rescheduled for the new civic year, with a revised target date of September 2008.

The Head of Law & Governance summarised the comments and feedback from the Task and Finish Groups, and issues for future groups:-

- The need to identify at an early stage, key resources and specific needs or training, i.e. navigation of websites
- Dedicated officer/staffing resources
- Timing of the investigation should be at an appropriate time of year, i.e. allotments should be undertaken when they are being regularly worked and harvested
- Facilities and additional information in the Members Area
- Awareness of reference facilities, i.e. the LGIU and LGA
- The use of a standard template for final reports
- The timing of recommendations that have financial implications, to identify and address a bid for funding in future years budgets
- To allow for the three-month period for Cabinet to produce a response to the recommendations.

Some of these issues would be discussed at the Scrutiny Steering Board on 23rd April 2008.

The Sub Group considered that the Task & Finish Groups require: -

- suitable publicity and/or an appropriate press release
- use of the website
- the recommendations being supported and put into operation
- to build on the enthusiasm shown by Councillors and maintain public interest
- three groups preferred
- appropriate allowances for the Chairman of each Task & Finish Group – although the Allotments Group had a three-month duration, whilst others were five months
- the reports identify shortcomings in the Council performance
- some process control of the Task & Finish Group – by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee - between Stages 3/4 or 4/5 of the flow chart (Pages 7 & 8 of report)
- the flow chart also needs to include a stage where a progress report can be made, an update received, and any issues reviewed
- if a Task & Finish Group require more time or wish to pursue a certain point, they will need to convince Overview & Scrutiny Committee of this, and increase flexibility.

Councillor M Gage referred to the governance and structure of the Council, i.e. Cabinet – Overview & Scrutiny – Task & Finish Groups, and considered that this was an ideal opportunity for Overview & Scrutiny to discuss with Cabinet Members their proposals/portfolios and how Overview & Scrutiny may support them. In response, Councillor Butland advised that as the Corporate Plan for 2008-2012 had recently been issued, there is no reason why the Overview & Scrutiny function cannot call on the Portfolio Holder to discuss their 'priorities' for this period.

40 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Formal response to Chairmen of Task & Finish Groups. The Chairman advised that a formal 'thank you' would be made to the Chairmen of the Task & Finish Groups when Cabinet makes its' response to the recommendations of the report(s), and that when the minutes are received at Council there will be opportunity for Member feedback.

It was noted that the next Sub Group meeting will be held at 6.00pm, on Tuesday 3rd June 2008, in the Causeway Room.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and closed at 6.55pm.

G BUTLAND

(Chairman)