

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the
Governance Review Joint Member Working Group
held on Friday, 20th April, 2012 in the Fred Flint Room, Westfields, Middlewich
Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor A Martin (Chairman)
Councillor G Baxendale (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors J P Findlow, L Gilbert, J Jackson, M Jones, S Jones, D Newton
and P Whiteley.

Officers

Brian Reed – Democratic and Registration Services Manager
Paul Jones – Democratic Services Team Manager
Cherry Foreman – Democratic Services Officer
Mark Nedderman – Scrutiny Team Manager
Jane Strange – Policy and Research Manager

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor B Murphy.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2012 be approved as a correct record.

19 GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS - INITIAL OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The Working Group considered a report of the Borough Solicitor setting out initial options for a revised governance structure; it was asked to indicate its preferred option for detailed development. In addition the Democratic and Registration Services Manager gave a presentation on the key components of each option, highlighting the salient differences.

Based on the broad parameters established by the Group at its last meeting three initial options had been developed to a preliminary stage. Consideration

of the options at this early stage was intended to stimulate debate and to further refine the preferences of the Group; a more detailed structure would then be developed around the specific requirements arising from the discussion.

The three options set out in the report were: -

- Option A – Advisory Policy Groups aligned to Overview and Scrutiny
- Option B – Advisory Policy Groups aligned to Cabinet
- Option C – Decision making Policy Groups aligned to Cabinet

Information on each included broad terms of reference, the relationship with overview and scrutiny, specific constitutional considerations and an indicative structure chart for comparison with the current governance structure.

In considering the advantages and disadvantages of each option particular account was taken of the overview and scrutiny functions to be maintained by the Council. The relationship between advisory panels (titles/terminology to be agreed), the opportunity for the call-in of decisions, and the need to gain the approval of the Secretary of State for any sort of hybrid structure were also considered. With regard to this last point it was anticipated that it could take a considerable time for approval to be given bearing in mind that Government guidance was still awaited. The resource implications of the differing options were also considered.

During a wide ranging discussion the main points arising included: -

- The need to ensure that cost implications to the Council of any governance changes were cost neutral.
- New arrangements must result in the greater involvement of Councillors in policy development at an early stage.
- No Councillor should sit on more than one advisory group in order to use and develop their areas of personal expertise.
- The additional time it would take to gain approval for more radical governance arrangements should not result in such options being dismissed at an early stage in favour of those that could be introduced more quickly and easily.
- The Terms of Reference for any scheme needed to be carefully formulated in order to ensure Members were awarded as much influence as possible in both the policy development and decision making processes.
- The position regarding the attendance of substitutes at meetings needed to be further discussed.

Whilst some Members favoured Option C as a long term goal, for the increased involvement it would give to a wider cohort of members, it was appreciated that the introduction of such a governance scheme would be considerably delayed whilst consent was sought. It was considered that the most expedient way forward was to opt for a scheme based on that set out in Option B; this had the advantage that it could be introduced at an early date

but that it could be developed and adapted in the light of experience, and also of emerging approvals by the Secretary of State.

RESOLVED

That

- (1) option A of the report be dismissed as it would not provide the range and extent of revised governance arrangements being sought by Members;
- (2) option B of the report be developed for further consideration, to include the appointment of members to Shadow Groups/Panels at an early stage;
- (3) an announcement of the draft proposals be made at the forthcoming Annual Council meeting, with a projected implementation date being the end of the calendar year; and
- (4) the Governance Review Joint Member Group continue to meet throughout the development of the revised governance arrangements, and also following implementation, in order to monitor effectiveness and guide future developments.

20 NEXT MEETING

Thursday 10 May 2012 at 9.30 am in the Fred Flint Room, Westfields.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.15 pm

Councillor A Martin (Chairman)