

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**18 April 2007**

---

**REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR INVOLVEMENT OF MEMBERS IN  
THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

**Purpose of report**

1. Following the workshop held on 27 March 2007 to ask the Standards Committee to make recommendations for consideration by the Council in May 2007 on possible revisions to the Council's decision making processes.

**Background**

2. Following the introduction of new executive arrangements under the Local Government Act 2000 the Leader of the Council established Advisory Panels to provide a structured forum for consultation to assist and inform the Cabinet in its decision-making. Advisory Panels derived their status and function from the Leader, rather than from the Council's Constitution.
3. In September 2006 the Leader discontinued advisory panels and proposed a series of alternative measures with the object of achieving more efficient arrangements in the Council's decision-making, including:
  - strengthening opportunities for local members to advise Cabinet Members before they take delegated decisions;
  - broadening the membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee;
  - extending the practice of special briefing sessions and seminars open to all members, to consider major documents and issues before they go to Cabinet;
  - reviewing the arrangements in July 2007.
4. It was clear from feedback given to the Leader that there was still some concern amongst Members about the adequacy of the proposed arrangements that would be replacing the function of Advisory Panels. The Leader agreed therefore, with Group Leaders, that the Standards Committee should be asked to review the current arrangements for Member involvement in the decision-making process. The Committee has a longstanding interest in the role of "backbench members" and at its

meeting in October 2006 expressed its wish to continue to monitor the opportunities for these members to contribute to and engage in the democratic process.

5. In a further report to Group Leaders dated 1 November 2006 the Leader summarised the three key areas which any revised decision-making arrangements had to meet to ensure that the County Council had a transparent and local council:
  - 5.1. a Cabinet Member delegated decision-making process which is used effectively and is transparent and which ensures that the required consultation and discussion has taken place before a decision is made;
  - 5.2. that proposed policy decisions are consulted upon properly and that appropriate opportunities are available for non-executive members to comment on such proposals before they arrive at Cabinet for a decision; and
  - 5.3. there is proper provision made for external organisations and partners to engage in the decision-making process.
6. Steps had already been taken to address 5.1 and 5.3 above, so Group Leaders agreed that the focus for the review should be on how best to engage members in policy decisions before they reach Cabinet.

### **Proposed Arrangements for the Review**

7. The Standards Committee agreed at its meeting on 24 January 2007 that it was important to seek the views of Members themselves as to what arrangements would work best from their point of view. It was therefore agreed that a workshop be held at which Members could make their views and ideas on this subject known.
8. A brief questionnaire was circulated with the invitation to the workshop asking Members for their views on the current system and what they wished to achieve from any new system. This helped frame the structure of the workshop.
9. The structure of the workshop was in two parts:
  - (i) firstly what works and what doesn't within the current system and most importantly what Members wanted to achieve within any revised decision making structures; and
  - (ii) what options are available and how do we address the aspirations identified within the first question.
10. Members were made aware at the workshop that they should take into account the following issues as part of their considerations:-

- There were certain constitutional and procedural requirements that any revised proposals would have to meet
- The current system of cabinet governance could not be replaced
- Any proposal should add value and complement the existing system and be capable of being met within existing resources
- The recent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill based on the Government's White Paper entitled "Stronger More Prosperous Communities" envisages an enhanced role for both the Overview and Scrutiny function and for individual members as community leaders.

### **Conclusions of Workshop**

11. The key outcome to the workshop were the aspirations expressed by members about what they wanted to achieve out of the decision making process and following on from that how they could meet these aspirations. These are summarised in Appendix 1. Attendance at the workshop is set out at Appendix 2.
12. These aspirations tend to be focussed on more effective use of our existing systems rather than some innovative new solution that would require a fundamental change to our constitution.
13. Some of the aspirations would also need detailed consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in terms of the way their practices could be developed. Other aspirations would need the coming together of various groups of officers to turn these aspirations into practice. It is suggested therefore that subject to the Council agreeing to take forward the suggestions from the workshop that an action plan is brought back to the next meeting of the Standards Committee to outline progress on the implementation of the agreed recommendations.
14. Other issues raised at the workshop will be actioned now such as increasing the awareness of all officers of the requirement to keep members informed of local issues and issues around the media protocol. The issue of ongoing member development is currently being addressed, partly through the Council's bid for Charter status on member development and through the Wiltshire Improvement Partnership project in conjunction with the four District Councils within Wiltshire.

### **Financial implications**

15. Any new arrangements arising from the review must be funded from within existing resources.

### **Risk Assessment**

16. An improved framework for decision-making will enhance the Council's

risk management.

### **Recommendation**

17. That the Standards Committee be asked to recommend to Council that it agrees the suggestions outlined in Appendix 1 to this report to help increase the engagement of members in the decision making process.
18. That subject to the Council agreeing 17 above, the Standards Committee receive an action plan at its next meeting on the progress towards implementing these revised proposals.

**STEPHEN GERRARD**  
**MONITORING OFFICER**

Report Author: John Quinton, Head of Democratic and Member Services

---

**Unpublished documents relied upon in the production of this report:**

**Environmental impact of the recommendations contained in the support: None**

## **SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES OF WORKSHOP**

### **WHAT DOESN'T WORK**

- **Members don't know what's going on**
- **Members aware of cabinet decisions too late to influence**
- **Briefing of opposition members**
- **Cabinet system doesn't engage members or partners – too much detailed/diverse information**
- **Communications with local members on local issues**
- **Meetings which are talking shops**

### **WHAT DOES WORK**

- **Cabinet works for the ruling administration**
- **Member seminars**
- **Overview and Scrutiny task groups which are well supported, responsive, involve “blue sky thinking”, are capable of changing people's positions on issues by producing evidenced based conclusions, take advantage of members interests and experience, involve representatives from outside the council**
- **Recent Overview and Scrutiny experiments on engaging members on the budget setting and monitoring process**

### **WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE**

- **Improving the “vibe”**
  - **More opportunities for members to have informal discussions**
  - **Quality time for cross party, “blue sky thinking”**
- **Improving transparency**
  - **Early identification of key themes/forthcoming issues to allow opportunity to influence and to ensure “no surprises”**
  - **Being clear about the timing of decisions**
- **Improved briefing of Members**
  - **To allow for the involvement of members to engage on specific topics/services adopting an evidenced based approach**
  - **For opposition groups**
  - **On local issues**

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

- **The “vibe”**
  - **Face2Face style informal meetings between cabinet and overview and scrutiny members**
  - **More seminars similar to the LTP seminar where there is a specific outcome and members have influence**
  - **Link events to other meetings eg council meetings**
  - **Involve officers at all levels to improve awareness and understanding of issues at all levels**
- **Transparency**
  - **Seminars linked to issues within the Cabinet’s Forward Plan**
  - **Leader/Cabinet Members to identify key forthcoming issues to enhance engagement of Overview and Scrutiny on key issues at an early stage**
  - **Develop Overview and Scrutiny function to make it more proactive, more focus on external issues, and investigate the possibility of aligning individual members or groups of members to specific Cabinet Member portfolios or key service areas eg Roads, Planning and Waste, Education on a select committee style**
- **Briefing of Members**
  - **To improve the flow of information to members by not producing more information but better information**
  - **To consider specifically what information members need to know to enable them to engage and inform their parish and town councils**
  - **To undertake local briefings within local areas**
  - **To implement a revised system to improve the briefing of opposition members, either collectively or through regular group leaders’ meetings, to improve trust and confidence**

**STANDARDS WORKSHOP – 27 MARCH 2007****GROUPS**

<b><u>GROUP 1</u></b>	<b><u>GROUP 2</u></b>	<b><u>GROUP 3</u></b>
<b><u>Room 3</u></b>	<b><u>Room 7</u></b>	<b><u>Room 8</u></b>
<b>Mr Molland</b> <b>Mr Moss</b> <b>Mr Noeken</b> <b>Mr Osborn</b> <b>Mrs Scott</b> <b>Mr West</b> <b>Mr While</b>	<b>Mr Baker</b> <b>Mr Deane</b> <b>Mr Henning</b> <b>Mr Johnson</b> <b>Mr Oldrieve</b> <b>Mrs Taylor</b> <b>Mr Thomson</b>	<b>Mrs Bryant</b> <b>Mr Coleman</b> <b>Mr Dalton</b> <b>Brig Hall</b> <b>Mrs White</b>
<b>Facilitators</b>  Peter McGuigan Keith Shipman Ian Gibbons Nina Wilton	<b>Facilitators</b>  Mrs O'Sullivan Mr Hewson John Quinton	<b>Facilitators</b>  Paul Lefever Mrs Rugg Jo Howes Yamina Rhouati

