
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Committee Room, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 20 November 2019 from 7.00pm - 8.35pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Mike Dendor, Alastair Gould (Chairman), Ann Hampshire, Kent Ingleton (substitute for Councillor Ken Pugh), Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, Paul Stephen (substitute for Corrie Woodford), Sarah Stephen and Ghlin Whelan (Vice-Chairman).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jo Millard, Sarah Porter and Bob Pullen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Baldock (Deputy Leader), Cameron Beart and Steve Davey.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Benjamin Martin, Ken Pugh and Corrie Woodford.

368 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

369 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 October 2019 (Minutes Nos. 300 – 306) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Deputy Leader thanked Members of the Policy Development and Review Committee (PDRC) for their input at that meeting.

370 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

371 CONSTITUTION REVIEW - AREA COMMITTEES

The Chairman said that the report would be considered page by page and each recommendation discussed.

The Chairman invited the Deputy Leader to speak. The Deputy Leader thanked the Working Group for their work on the report.

A Member of the Working Group introduced the report. He outlined the recommendations (a) to (g). The Deputy Leader drew attention to recommendation (f) and said that it was the Committee's role to consider the number of area committees per year. The Policy and Performance Officer explained the process for considering any amendments to the recommendations and explained that the Policy Development and Review Committee could only make recommendations to the Cabinet member with responsibility for the Constitutional review.

Pages 4 – 6 – Provisions for area committees, survey results, should the Council introduce area committees?

A Member drew attention to Appendix III on page 47 of the report and said there should be a full cost benefit carried out before a decision was made. He referred to the Special Responsibility Allowance granted to chairmen of the area committees, which would have to be agreed by the Remuneration Panel.

A Member said that under previous area committees, chairmen did not receive an allowance. The same Member had concerns about what activities would cease if there were higher direct staff costs, or increased demands on senior management resources as at 3.7 of the report.

In the discussion that followed it was acknowledged that the proposed area committees had delegated power to distribute funds and the Remuneration panel would need to be consulted.

A Member shared his concern about the impact that the introduction of the area committees would have on officers who already had a heavy workload and in teams where experienced officers had not been replaced. Other Members agreed that the cost benefit analysis had to be quantifiable.

In response to a Member's question on how staff costs were calculated, the Policy and Performance Officer advised that the hourly rate costs were provided by Human Resources, and there were currently no senior staff costs included in the estimated costs.

Members made other points that included:

- The public would need to be fully aware of how area committees were funded;
- what was 'public participation' and how was it measured?;
- there should be a review after a year, to consider how much public interest there was;
- area committees were not just about public engagement;
- the public could still contribute and be effective without attending area committees;
- area committees could also be useful for engaging with parish and town councils in areas where they existed; and
- there was no purpose if the public did not attend as Ward Members could meet residents at any time, and there were other mechanisms already available such as ward surgeries.

A Member said that the previous Local Engagement Fora were ineffective. In response, a Member said that the proposal was for area committees, not public engagement fora. He said that the area committees could be set up to deal with specific issues in an area as each area had different characteristics and needs. A Member added that there was great disparity within areas.

Members agreed to add the following to recommendation (a):

the resources necessary to support area committees are clearly identified.

Page 6 – Delegated powers

In response to Members' questions on delegated powers, the Policy and Performance Officer clarified that the list of functions within each Committee would be detailed within the Constitution.

The Deputy Leader suggested the order of points under delegated powers in the report be amended, bringing the reference to delegated powers to the top in Appendix II.

Members agreed recommendation (b).

Pages 6 – 7 Membership

During the discussion Members agreed to add the following to recommendation (c):

Chairman and vice-chairman are elected annually by the ward members of the committees; and

the two Members of Parliament who represent parts of Swale should be invited to attend the committees as appropriate.

Page 8 Parish and Town Councils

There was a discussion around the involvement of Parish and Town Councils at Area Committees and the mechanism for speaking. A Member referred to the public participation rules in the Constitution.

Members agreed to amend recommendation (d) to the following:

Parish and town councils be invited to send a representative to attend each area committee meeting.

Pages 8 – 9 Role of the public

Members made points including the following:

- Should each Agenda item be time-limited for discussion?
- the time for discussion should be equal for all;
- the discussion time could be reviewed in the future;
- there needed to be effective Agenda setting;
- the process was built on the Parish Council model and could be developed; and
- discouraged presentations by public bodies at the Area Committees.

Members agreed recommendation (e).

Pages 9 – 11 Number and timing of meetings

Members updated recommendation (f) to refer to the timing of meetings rather than the frequency, as follows:

The working group recommends to Cabinet that the committees should meet four times per year, but that the timings of meetings are left to each committee to determine.

Pages 10 – 11 Areas covered

A Member of the Committee, who was a Ward Member, gave his strong opinion that Teynham and Lynsted had little relationship with Sittingbourne and, if Cabinet decided there should be three area committees, the ward should be part of the Faversham area committee. He added that his preference was for four area committees, including a rural area committee.

In the discussion that followed Members made points that included:

- There were too many wards in the proposed Sittingbourne area committee if a three committee model were to be adopted;
- many wards contained rural and urban areas which made it difficult to split;
- Teynham and Lynsted covered a very large geographical area;
- it was difficult to split Sittingbourne as it was a town with surrounding rural areas;
- there was a diverse group of parishes on the Isle of Sheppey, not associated with each other but many had the same issues;
- all area committees would include urban and rural areas;
- it was not logical to split the Borough in an artificial way; and
- suggested splitting Sittingbourne into the Kent County Council (KCC) wards.

The Deputy Leader acknowledged that Teynham felt more of an affinity with Faversham than Sittingbourne and noted the Ward Member's preference.

Members agreed that if Cabinet Members decided on three area committees, the following amended recommendations for (g) and (h) should apply:

Faversham (Abbey; Boughton and Courtenay; East Downs; Priory; St Ann's; Teynham and Lynsted; and Watling);

Isle of Sheppey (Minster Cliffs; Queenborough and Halfway; Sheerness; Sheppey Central; and Sheppey East);

Sittingbourne (Bobbing, Iwade and Lower Halstow; Borden and Grove Park; Chalkwell; Hartlip, Newington and Upchurch; Homewood; Kemsley; Milton Regis; Murston; Roman; The Meads; West Downs; and Woodstock).

That Teynham and Lynsted forms part of the Faversham area

Members asked Cabinet to reconsider introducing four area committees, rather than three.

Page 11 – Alternative options

Members discussed the alternative options and agreed that if Cabinet decided against implementing area committees, Member grants should be increased by the amount of funding proposed for area committees.

A copy of the updated report to submit to the Cabinet member with responsibility for the Constitutional review is attached to these minutes as Appendix A.

Resolved:

(1) That the report on Area Committees, with amended recommendations, be submitted to the Cabinet member with responsibility for the Constitutional review for consideration.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel