

LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM

MINUTES of the meeting of the CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY, which was open to the press and public, held on MONDAY, 10 APRIL 2006 at LEWISHAM TOWN HALL, CATFORD, SE6 4RU at 6.30 p.m.

Present

Councillors, Long, Moore, Morris, and Smith.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anderson and Whiting.

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ELECTION OF CHAIR

In the absence of the Chair, members agreed unanimously Councillor Moore be elected Chair for the meeting.

Councillor Moore in the chair

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RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Working Party held on 10 March 2006 be confirmed and signed subject to an amendment provided by Councillor Anderson in respect of the comments attributed to him. (copy filed with the minutes).

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (page

There were no declarations of interest.

3 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY:REVIEW AND ISSUES ON THE WAY FORWARD (page

The Chief Executive presented the report and outlined the options which had been identified regarding the areas discussed by the Working Party at its last meeting.

The Chair invited general comments prior to consideration of the specific proposals identified by the Chief Executive. Councillor Morris sought further information about the resources mentioned in Paragraph 70 of the report. The Chief Executive explained he intended to manage the deployment of resources so that all select committees had a fair share of available resources to avoid the situation where one or two select committees drew unequally upon resources to the detriment of other committees.

Councillor Long said paragraphs 76 and 88 appeared to be contradictory regarding the rights of opposition members to chair

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select committees and she asked for clarification. The Head of Law stated although government guidance said councils were obliged to consider allocating select committee chairs to minority parties, there was no resultant statutory requirement that this actually takes place.

The Working Party agreed unanimously the first two recommendations in Paragraph 83 of the report, stressing in particular the need for suitable senior management support at Business Panel meetings. They debated the role of Overview and Scrutiny in the executive process and the role of the Mayor within the scrutiny function. They agreed the inter relationship could be enhanced if the Chair or Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny was given an entitlement to attend and speak at any Mayor & Cabinet meeting where a call-in was listed for discussion, while in turn the Mayor should have permissive rights to attend any Business Panel meeting. The Business Panel would further be entitled to request the Mayor to attend any of its meetings.

The Working Party decided to recommend chairs and vice chairs of select committees should be allocated to political groups on a pro-rata basis according to their numbers on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members considered public question time at council meetings as concerns had been raised by some of the survey respondents. They welcomed the opportunities afforded to the public to hold elected representatives to account at Area Forums and Mayors meetings and considered reforming question time at council meetings so that written answers only would be provided. They concluded there was a need to balance efficient decision making with transparency of the political process and agreed public questions should be further considered at a future meeting of the working party.

Chief
Executive

The Working Party debated in depth the future direction and remit of select committees. They proposed the formation of five select committees; four broadly following the four blocks of the Local Area Agreement framework and the fifth a retained Public Accounts Committee. All five proposed select committees would be expected to address equalities issues.

The Children and Young People Select Committee was to be retained and there would be three new select committees. A Sustainable Development Select Committee would consider all economic development and environmental matters. A Healthier Communities Select Committee would undertake all statutory health scrutiny consultations as well as considering health related issues across all age groups. A Safer and Stronger

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Communities select committee would undertake the soon to be statutory role in the overview of Crime Reduction services.

All select committees would have between 9 and 11 members and the constitutional changes required to put them into effect were to be considered by the Council AGM in May 2006.

The Working Party explored the need for a possible sixth select committee examining strategic level issues with membership derived from the other five committees and they looked at the ability to create further time limited select committees charged with looking at specific issues. They agreed any identified need for a strategic level select committee or for flexible ad hoc select committees should be considered at a future meeting of the Working Party.

Chief Executive

RESOLVED that:

(i) Overview and Scrutiny Business Panels be attended by officers of sufficient seniority to be able to explain the recommendations contained in reports previously agreed by the Mayor and Cabinet.

(ii) All Executive Directors be required to ensure Overview and Scrutiny select committee work is led by a Service head who will attend meetings as required to advise the select committee.

All Exec Directors

(iii) The use of independent expert witnesses at select committee meetings be sustained and developed further.

(iv) Resources be made available by the Chief Executive to allow select committees as part of their work programmes to commission detailed research and to provide support to community engagement, researching community views and encouraging community participation in scrutiny activities.

Chief Executive

(v) Five select committees of between 9 and 11 members be established as follows:

- Children and Young People
- Healthier Communities

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- Public Accounts
 - Safer & Stronger Communities
 - Sustainable Development
- (vi) The Chair or the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be entitled to attend and speak at any Mayor and Cabinet meeting where a call-in was due to be considered.
- (vii) A discretion be given to the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel to request the attendance of the Mayor at any of its meetings.
- (viii) A discretion be given to the Mayor to attend meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel.
- (ix) Chairs and vice-chairs of select committees be allocated annually to political groups in accordance with the proportion of seats on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- (x) All constitutional changes required to put into effect resolutions (v) to (ix) be considered at the Council AGM in May 2006. Head of Law
- (xi) A future meeting of the Working Party consider options for changes to public question time and the possible creation of a strategic select committee or ad hoc select committees.

The meeting ended at 7.38 p.m.

Chair