

Meeting: COUNCIL

Agenda Item:

Date: 20 May 2009

7

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider various matters relating to the political management structure of the Council for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the new arrangements relating to Neighbourhood Forums and Neighbourhood Action Teams, as set out at paragraphs 4.1-4.4 below, be approved.

2.2 That the Terms of Reference for the following bodies that form the political management structure of the Council, as detailed in the appendices to this report, be approved:

- The Executive (Appendix A)
- Scrutiny Overview Committee (Appendix B)
- Planning & Development Committee (Appendix C)
- Licensing Committee (Appendix D)
- General Purposes Committee (Appendix E)
- Appointments Committee (Appendix F)
- Standards Committee (Appendix G)
- Audit Committee (Appendix H)
- Neighbourhood Action Teams (Appendix I)
- Statement of Accounts Committee (Appendix J)
- Stevenage/HCC Highways Joint Member Panel (Appendix K)

2.3 That the Executive Portfolios, as set out at Appendix L to this report, be approved.

2.4 That Stewart Gillies, Ananda Hale and Allen Holland be appointed as

Independent Members of the Standards Committee and Brian Mitchell be appointed as the Independent Member of the Audit Committee.

2.5 That subject to Council's approval of 2.2 and 2.3 above, the relevant sections of the Council's Constitution be amended accordingly.

2.6 That Council approves the dates for Council meetings for the Municipal Year, as shown at paragraph 4.6 and notes the draft dates for other meetings as shown at Appendix M.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The political management structure, the terms of reference of the comprising bodies and the Executive Portfolios are matters to be determined by Council. The political management structure and Executive Portfolios recommended are little changed from 2008/2009, however as the Council is required to approve its Statement of Accounts by 30 June each year and there is no Council meeting scheduled for that time it will be necessary to delegate this function to a Statement of Accounts Committee which will meet on 29 June.

3.2 In order to comply with the relevant legislation the membership of the Standards Committee must include at least one-quarter non-elected Independent Members. With a total membership of nine three individuals are recommended for appointment. Additionally, the Audit Commission/CIPFA advises that a non-elected, Independent Co-opted Member be appointed to serve on the Audit Committee.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTIONS AND OTHER OPTIONS

Neighbourhood Action Teams / Neighbourhood Forums

4.1 At its meeting on 29 April 2009 the Executive agreed new arrangements for the former Area Committees. A review of the operation of the Area Committees had been undertaken, led by Councillor David Kissane. The review concluded that one particular hurdle that deterred people from attending meetings was that they were too structured and there was a need for these events to be less formal. Given that to make decisions in relation to budget spend etc... a degree of formality was required to comply with legislation and the Council's Constitution, it was agreed that informal Neighbourhood Forums be introduced, mirrored by a formal decision making body for each Area.

4.2 The formal decision making bodies, to be known as Neighbourhood Action Teams, are required to be appointed as 'Area Committees' of the Council, comprising the relevant Ward Members for that area and will have spending powers delegated from the Executive. The six Teams will receive reports on matters raised at the Forums and can take formal decisions in relation to local budgets and the Neighbourhood Action Plan and will have responsibility for consultation with partners. From the September cycle these formal business meetings will be held in Daneshill House.

4.3 The Neighbourhood Forums are to be chaired by the Councillor appointed as Chair of the Neighbourhood Action Team and will meet 3-4 weeks before

the relevant Action Teams. Up to four meetings of each Forum will be supported by the Community Development Team who will then report into their Action Team meeting. The new Action Team meetings will continue to be formally administered by Constitutional Services 'Area Committees' of the Council.

4.4 The dates of the Forums do not yet appear in the Council Calendar. The Community Development Team are currently considering dates and venues. Every attempt will be made to ensure that there are a minimal number of clashes between the dates of Forums and other Committee meetings, but given the congestion of meetings this can not always be guaranteed. The Forums will be introduced in the second cycle of meetings and will be reporting into the Action Teams in September. As the Forums will need to meet about 3-4 weeks before the Action Team meeting, this may mean that some Forum meetings will be held in August.

Terms of Reference / Executive Portfolios

4.5 Apart from the new arrangements for the new Neighbourhood Action Teams in place of Area Committees and additional provisions for the Scrutiny Overview Committee in relation to Councillor Call for Action and duties under the Police and Justice Act 2006, minimal changes to Terms of Reference are recommended.

4.6 The Executive Portfolio Areas recommended are the same as those for 2008-2009.

Dates of Council meetings

4.7 To comply with Standing Orders the Council should approve its programme of meetings annually. The approval of dates for Council meetings for the year does not preclude extraordinary meetings being called by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Mayor; nor for the date, time or place to be altered where a material change of circumstances makes it necessary. The dates proposed for Council are as follows :

- Thursday 18 June 2009 (To be confirmed - Extraordinary Meeting - Rents, Treasury Management Strategy, Management Reorganisation)
- Wednesday 22 July 2009
- Wednesday 7 October 2009
- Wednesday 9 December 2009
- Wednesday 27 January 2010 (Extraordinary Meeting- HRA and Rents)
- Wednesday 24 February 2010
- Wednesday 26 May 2010 (Annual Council)

4.8 A provisional calendar of meetings is also appended to this report. This calendar differs from the draft circulated in April and will be subject to further change. Alterations to dates of meetings, additions and cancellations will be notified to Members in the usual way. Details of the calendar of formal meetings also appears on the Council's website and is updated as required.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- The Council's Constitution

APPENDICES

- Terms of Reference (Appendices A - K)
- Executive Portfolios (Appendix L)
- Provisional calendar of meetings (Appendix M)