

Final Report of the Project Team
as approved by the Review Committee

Review of the Operation of the New Political Decision Making Structure



REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION
MAKING STRUCTURE

1 Index

1 **Index** 2
 2 **Glossary** 2
 3 **Introduction**..... 3
 4 **Background**..... 4
 5 **Terms of reference** 5
 6 **Methodology** 6
 7 **Findings**..... 7
 7.1 Analysis of questionnaires 7
 7.2 Meeting with Area Committee Chairmen and Executive Board Chairman
 and Vice-Chairman 10
 7.3 Observations on the operation of the Executive Board and Area Committees
 10
 8 **Conclusion** 13
 9 **Recommendations** 14
Appendix 1..... 21
Appendix 2..... 27
Appendix 3..... 28
Appendix 4..... 29

2 Glossary

CfPS	Centre for Public Scrutiny

**If you would like this information in large print, braille or
another language please contact 01702 546366**

3 Introduction

At the meeting of the Review Committee on the 5 June 2007 it was decided that a team would be formed to look at this subject during the year.

The team met on a regular basis during the year to formulate the various questionnaires, analyse the responses received from the various sources and develop recommendations.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

4 Background

- 4.1 At the beginning of the 2007/08 Municipal year a new political decision making structure was introduced that included an Executive Board and 3 Area Committees replacing the 5 policy Committees which existed the previous year.
- 4.2 The regulatory/probity Committees i.e. Development Control, Licensing, Appeals, Audit and Standards did not change under the new regulations and continued to operate as before.
- 4.3 At the meeting of the Full Council on the 27 February 2007 it was suggested that the Review Committee might wish to consider undertaking a Review of the new structure and this was endorsed by the Review Committee on the 5 June 2007.
- 4.4 The changes to the political structure were made in response to the implications of the Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" and the emerging requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. These place greater emphasis on developing a stronger role for Local Authorities engaging with their communities and promoting change to secure service improvement and empowered communities. There is now greater emphasis on stronger leadership and accountability at the local level, developing the role of local Ward Councillors, and working at the neighbourhood level.

5 Terms of reference

- 5.1 It was agreed that the Review would monitor the operation of the Executive Board, particularly the decision making against the published Forward Plan and the Key Policies and Actions report for 2007/08 submitted to Council on the 27 February 2007.
- 5.2 It was also agreed that the Review would monitor the operation of the 3 Area Committees in relation to their engagement with the public and other appropriate bodies.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

6 Methodology

6.1 The team monitored:-

- The Decisions of the Executive Board via the published minutes and compared these to the decision dates contained within the published Forward Plan and the Key Policies and Actions report for 2007/08.
- The operation and topics covered by the Area Committees with attention being paid to those items covered within the Community Forum section of the meetings.

- 6.2 Questionnaires were sent to members of the public who spoke at the Area Committee meetings as well as those that attended to listen to the debates to obtain their input. The initial questionnaires were sent out in September 2007 with follow up questionnaires being dispatched in January 2008 for comparison purposes.
- 6.3 Parish Council representatives on the Area Committees were asked for their opinions on the format of the Area Committee meetings and invited to comment on possible changes.
- 6.4 Police representatives on the Area Committees were asked for their opinions on the format of the Area Committee meetings and invited to comment on possible changes.
- 6.5 Representatives from the other bodies on the Area Committees were asked for their opinions on the format of the Area Committee meetings and invited to comment on possible changes.
- 6.6 Area Committee Lead Officers were asked for their opinions on the format of the Area Committee meetings and invited to comment on possible changes.
- 6.7 Other officers attending the Area Committee meetings were also asked for their opinions on the format.
- 6.8 All District Councillors were canvassed both in September 2007 and again in January 2008 to ascertain if the observations made in September were still pertinent.
- 6.9 The three Area Committee Chairmen and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Executive Board were invited to attend a Committee meeting in order for their views on the new structure to be obtained and used in the Review.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION
MAKING STRUCTURE

7 Findings

7.1 Analysis of questionnaires

7.1.1 Questionnaires were sent out to both Members' of the District Council and the public who had attended the Area Committee meetings and signed an attendance sheet. These were sent out in September 2007 initially, with a further questionnaire in February 2008 to confirm that administrative changes introduced following the initial canvassing had improved the situation.

7.1.2 Due to the small number of questionnaires received back in each canvassing it only took a small number of responses to make a large change in the percentage and, therefore, the results need to be treated with caution. However, it is apparent that on the basis of the responses received, the responses are relatively positive.

Area Committee Questionnaire – Analysis of Members' September 2007 Feedback

		Strongly Agree/ Agree	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
1	The Area Committee that I attend has allowed me to fully hear and understand local issues.	72%	28%
2	The general public have been able to obtain adequate answers to those local items that cause them concern.	72%	28%
3	I understand how an item brought forward at an Area Committee is referred to the Executive Board.	62%	38%
4	I understand how an item is referred to an Area Committee.	55%	45%
5	I understand what issues can be referred to an Area Committee.	55%	45%
6	The input of the Parish Councillors and other representatives has been of interest to the general public.	89%	11%
7	The input of the Police and Essex Highways has been of interest to me as a Member of the Committee.	100%	-
8	Issues brought to the Area Committees are relevant and of interest to the local Community.	83%	17%
9	Issues brought to the Area Committees are relevant and of interest to me as a Member of the Committee.	89%	11%
10	The venues for the Area Committees have been appropriate in size and location (please specify any comments in the box provided on the reverse of this form).	62%	38%

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION
MAKING STRUCTURE

11	The Community Forum is proving a good way of enabling local residents to have their say.	89%	11%
----	--	-----	-----

**Area Committee Questionnaire – Analysis of Members’ February 2008
Feedback**

		Agree /Strongly Agree	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
1	The Area Committee that I attend has allowed me to fully hear and understand local issues.	81%	19%
2	The general public have been able to obtain adequate answers to those local items that cause them concern.	65%	35%
3	I understand how an item is referred to an Area Committee.	62%	38%
4	I understand what issues can be referred to an Area Committee.	67%	33%
5	The input of the Police has been of interest to me as a Member of the Committee.	89%	11%
6	The input of Essex Highways has been of interest to me as a Member of the Committee.	100%	
7	Issues brought to the Area Committees are relevant and of interest to the local Community and me as a Member of the Committee.	76%	24%
8	The Community Forum is proving a good way of enabling local residents to have their say.	61%	39%

7.1.3 Question 2 on the questionnaires shows an increase in those Members that disagreed between the September and February canvassing. However, this perception by Members was not borne out by the results of the public questionnaires where there was an increase in the satisfaction with responses given. (See paragraph 7.1.8)

7.1.4 Questions 4 and 5 on the September questionnaire were the same as questions 3 and 4 on the February questionnaire and, whilst the number of Members that disagreed with these statements has decreased the team still feel that there needs to be more detailed information to Members on the aspects.

7.1.5 Question 11 in September and question 8 in February are the same and again the number of Members who disagreed with this statement rose in February. This increase is probably due to the number of meetings that the Members have attended and the problems of certain members of the public dominating meetings. This is borne out by the

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

comments returned. The team feel that this and the increase seen in the response to question 2 can be resolved by the introduction of a protocol for public questions at the Area Committees.

7.1.6 Question 10 in September asked whether the venues were appropriate. This generated a significant amount of disagreement and comments from the Members. It was recognised by the team that significant time and effort had been put into the selection of the venues and problems had been encountered with a lack of availability of the most suitable venues. There was an uncertainty as to the number of members of the public that would need to be catered for. During the year further venues were identified and meetings were switched accordingly. It was also noticed that at a number of venues officers were involved in setting up and taking down the tables and chairs used at the meeting and this gave rise to health and safety concerns. Using the experiences from this year other more suitable venues have been identified which should alleviate many of the problems raised.

Public Feedback – Analysis of September 2007 responses

		Strongly Agree/ Agree	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
1	I was able to access the venue without difficulty	94%	6%
2	I considered the venue to be suitable for the meeting	91%	9%
3	I feel that the way the Committee functioned enabled me to see, hear and follow proceedings	72%	28%
4	The topics discussed were relevant to the Area	100%	-
5	The question that I raised was answered to my satisfaction	47%	53%

Public feedback - Analysis of February 2008 responses

		Strongly Agree /Agree	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
1	I was able to access the venue without difficulty	100%	
2	I feel that the way the Committee functioned enabled me to see, hear and follow proceedings	55%	45%
3	The topics discussed were relevant to the Area	100%	
4	The question that I raised was answered to my satisfaction	67%	33%

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

- 7.1.7 Question 2 in February saw an increase in the numbers of the public who disagreed that they could follow the proceedings of the Committee. This possibly relates to the fact that more people have attended some meetings and this has resulted in logistical issues in terms of dealing with large numbers of the public.
- 7.1.8 Question 4 in February saw an increase in the number of members of the public who were satisfied with the responses they had received to their questions, which was different to the perception that the Members had expressed in the results of their questionnaire.
- 7.1.9 All the other attendees were canvassed for their opinions in December 2007 / January 2008.
- 7.1.10 All the comments and suggestions that were made on the questionnaires were examined by the Project Team prior to the formulation of their recommendations.

7.2 Meeting with Area Committee Chairmen and Executive Board Chairman and Vice-Chairman

- 7.2.1 This meeting took place on the 15 January 2007 at a meeting of the Review Committee, the minutes of which are a matter of public record and are, therefore, not reproduced here. Unfortunately, Councillor C G Seagers the East Area Committee Chairman was not able to attend the above mentioned meeting, but he sent the team his answers to the questions asked of his colleagues, so that his views could be included in the review.
- 7.2.2 The information collected has been considered by the project team prior to producing the recommendations contained at the end of this report.

7.3 Observations on the operation of the Executive Board and Area Committees

- 7.3.1 The Forward Plan was introduced at the start of the 2007/08 Municipal year at the same time as the Executive Board came into being. As part of the Review, the team studied the monthly versions of the Plan and also the Key Policies and Actions report for 2007/08, which was submitted to Council on the 27 February 2007. Whilst it was recognised that the business had progressed in a timely manner it was felt that certain changes would be beneficial to the understanding of the Plan and assisting the Review Committee in its overview role and, therefore, these have been included in the recommendations at the end of this report.
- 7.3.2 The team also looked at the Agenda and Minutes of the Area Committees and the Executive Board to see if any improvements could be made from issues that the team identified. Once again any

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION
MAKING STRUCTURE

recommendations that the team formulated have been included at the end of the report.

7.3.3 During the year the team noticed that the way the Council utilised the Area Committees for consultations could be improved and the team, therefore, took this into consideration when formulating its recommendations.

7.3.4 The Area Committees have had a varied reception and attendance by the public. The West Area Committee has been the best attended of the three Committees and this, in part, can be linked to the items raised at the meetings. The table below details the approximate number of members of the public who have attended each of the three area committee meetings. Overall attendance is certainly in excess of public attendance at the majority of Council meetings at the Civic Suite under the previous Committee system.

**Area Committees
Attendance by the Public**

Area Committee	Venue	Date	Approx. Number of public Attending		
			Central	East	West
Central	Greensward College	12 June 2007	11		
West	Rayleigh Methodist	18 July 2007			15
Central	Hullbridge	24 July 2007	5		
East	St John Ambulance	25 July 2007		12	
West	Downhall County Primary	4 September 2007			76
East	Great Wakering	12 September 2007		19	
Central	Hawkwell Village Hall	20 September 2007	23		
West	Sweyne Park School	16 October 2007			17
Central	Hullbridge	24 October 2007	81		
East	Stambridge Memorial Hall	31 October 2007		12	
West	Salvation Army Hall	28 November 2007			58
Central	Greensward College	4 December 2007	22		
East	Great Wakering	12 December 2007		10	
West	The Mill	8 January 2008			32
East	Great Wakering	16 January 2008		12	
Central	Hullbridge	22 January 2008	10		
West	Rawreth	14 February 2008			51
East	St John Ambulance	27 February 2008		4	
Total			152	69	249

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

- 7.3.5 The team also examined costs associated with the Area Committees and a breakdown of these costs has been reproduced below for information purposes.
- 7.3.6 It was felt that the associated costs of providing the Area Committees gave value for money as more members of the public had attended the Area Committees than had attended the more formal meetings held at the Civic Suite in Rayleigh. The meetings had also given the public an outlet to voice their concerns and views on the Area in which they lived.

Area Committees

Cost of venues etc

Area Committee	Number of meetings	Cost of hire	Cost of refreshments	Cost of sound system	Total Cost
Central	6	£449	£510	£948	£1907
East	6	£402	£510	£867	£1320
West	6	£564	£510	£818	£1474

- 7.3.7 Whilst most Parish Councillors have indicated that they welcome the interaction with the District Councillors at the Area Committee meetings, from the questionnaires returned and the comments made it is clear that there is some confusion as to how they can raise items for discussion at the meetings. The team feel that the easiest way to resolve this uncertainty would be for a role profile to be drawn up for the Parish Councillors who are Members of the Area Committees.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 Whilst there has been differing views on the Area Committees from both the public and Members, this is outweighed by the number of public and Members who think the meetings are proving useful. This is the first year that the Area Committees have been in existence and it was always known that there would be teething problems and that some procedures and processes would need to be adjusted in light of experience.
- 8.2 As part of the Review the team have looked at other Local Authorities to examine the procedures they have introduced in relation to Area Committees and the Forward Plan. The team were keen to learn from other Authorities and have used the Centre of Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) reviews library and the Internet during its research. The team have based some of their recommendations on the successful practices seen at other Councils such as Stevenage, Basildon, Uttlesford and South Somerset.
- 8.3 The project team have taken into account all the comments made by those canvassed to formulate the recommendations at the end of this report.
- 8.4 Some comments, for example those relating to the lack of a sound system and the difficulty of hearing the speakers at certain venues, have already been addressed during the course of the year.

9 Recommendations

The first 12 recommendations relate to the team's examination of the operation of the Area Committees.

During the 2007/08 Municipal Year each Area Committee met seven times throughout the year. From the comments received via the questionnaires it was clear that with this level of frequency of meetings it was difficult for the outside representatives to attend every meeting. Also, there was insufficient time between meetings for any real progress to take place on many of the items raised in the Community Forum.

Recommendation No 1

It is recommended to the Executive Board that future Area Committee meetings should be held quarterly, with provision made in the timetable for special meetings if required.

The following recommendation is considered necessary if the first recommendation is approved in relation to the number of meetings. Rather than wait for the next meeting to provide a response to items raised through the Community Forum, it is felt that it would be better for the local Ward Councillor/s Area Committee Chairmen to take up the matter on behalf of resident/s so that an early resolution to a question can be achieved. This would enable Ward Members to be seen to be exercising their community leadership role.

Recommendation No 2

It is recommended to the Executive Board that a procedure is established that enables any questions received immediately after an Area Committee meeting to be dealt with by Ward Councillors or Area Committee Chairmen as appropriate, rather than wait for the next Area Committee meeting.

It was noticed during the review that some items that had been included in the spotlight issues on the Agendas were spread out across the Committees during the year. This meant that some Area Committees were hearing more recent data than others due to the timing of the presentations. It was felt that for the most benefit to be gained from these presentations, Members needed to receive the same information on topics in the same cycle of meetings. It was also felt that items for discussion should be accompanied by a written report to aid Members' understanding where possible.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

Recommendation No 3

It is recommended to the Executive Board that agenda items, where practicable, need to be in the same cycle at all Area Committees and, where possible, a written report be included with the Agenda to aid understanding.

From the team's observation of the Area Committee meetings it is felt that some of the confusion for the public and Members of the Committee at the meetings is caused by the way items are detailed on the Agendas. It is felt that it is necessary to look at the way the items are listed on the Agendas to aid clarity for all attendees and a sample of an agenda is contained in appendix 1 of this report.

Recommendation No 4

It is recommended to the Executive Board that the following changes to the Area Committee Agendas are made:-

- The Community Forum is moved to the start of the meeting to include updates from the police and County Highways or other public agencies as appropriate.
- The use of the term "spotlight issues" is removed and instead details of the purpose of any Agenda items are included on the Agenda, (e.g. whether for public consultation, decision, information etc.)
- The update should be split into two sections to separate the updates on questions from members of the public from the update on matters raised during the formal part of the meeting.
- The update containing responses to public questions should be issued at the time of Agenda despatch for information only and should not be a formal agenda item.
- The update on matters raised during the formal part of the meeting should be an agenda item, with the expectation that comments are on an "exception" basis.

From the responses to the questionnaires the team felt that it could be of benefit to have provision to hold separate formal Area Committee meetings or Community Forums when it was appropriate to do so.

Recommendation No 5

It is recommended to the Executive Board that a facility be introduced to hold an Area Committee meeting to conduct formal business without a Community Forum, or vice versa, when it is appropriate to do so.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

Following Member and public feedback via the questionnaires the team felt that, as with other forms of interaction with the public such as via Full Council and Development Control meetings, a protocol for raising questions should be prepared. This could be included within Area Committee Agendas and on the Council's web site to aid public understanding.

Recommendation No 6

It is recommended to the Executive Board that the rules to ask public questions through the Community Forum part of the meeting at Area Committees, contained in appendix 2 of this report, be adopted.

It has been recognised by the team that as the Area Committees continue, more Council officers will be required to provide presentations and answer questions from residents. To ensure that they are confident in this role and the public are provided with the correct information, it is felt that it would be of value for further training and development to be provided to assist these officers.

Recommendation No 7

It is recommended to the Executive Board that the annual officer training and development programme should include elements around presentations, public speaking and answering questions to assist those officers who will be attending Area Committees and meeting the public.

It was noticed that the majority of public visitors to the Area Committees were as a result of contentious issues being discussed such as Housing and Dog Control. The Team felt that in order to widen the interest in the meetings by the public it would be appropriate to explore means of publicity such as public advertising, the production of information leaflets and through Rochford District Matters.

Recommendation No 8

It is recommended to the Executive Board that additional methods of publicising the Area Committee meetings are explored for the next Municipal year i.e. public advertising, the production of information leaflets and through Rochford District Matters.

A problem highlighted from the questionnaires is that some members of the public could only attend the Area Committee meetings which are local to them

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

because there was a lack of public transport. In line with our commitment to “diversity and equality” for residents, and the desire to engage with those with limited transport options, the following recommendation is made.

Recommendation No 9

It is recommended to the Executive Board that a feasibility study of the costs and benefits of providing transport to allow the public with mobility problems or lack of access to public transport to attend Area Committee meetings be explored.

It was felt by the team that the possibility of providing a budget to each Committee for allocation by them in the local area should be explored. From discussions with the Area Committee Chairmen it is the team’s opinion that before the introduction of any budgets, issues around budget allocation and control are examined in more depth.

Recommendation No 10

It is recommended to the Executive Board that the provision of a budget allocation for each Area Committee, to allow them to decide which local issues need supporting, be examined in more detail by the Review Committee during the next municipal year.

To aid a clear understanding for all Parish/Town Councillors who are Members of the Area Committees a suggested role profile has been drawn up by the team.

Recommendation No 11

It is recommended to the Executive Board that the role profile, attached at appendix 3, for Parish/Town Councillors who are Members of the Area Committees is adopted and sent to the Parish/Town Councils when they are asked for nominations for next years Area Committees.

During the team’s examinations of the responses from the questionnaires it was noticed that a number of Members were still unclear on how they could refer an issue to the Area Committee. It was felt that clear guidance was required for Members covering this issue and so the team have prepared a possible wording for issue to Members.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

Recommendation No 12

It is recommended to the Executive Board that the guidance for District Members on Area Committees, attached at appendix 4, is adopted.

The following recommendations have been formulated by the team from their examination of the operation of the Executive Board

In order to make the Forward Plan more user friendly and to assist Members with assessing the importance of the entries contained in the Plan it is suggested that an extra column be added to specify the risk of not taking the action.

Recommendation No 13

It is recommended to the Executive Board that details of the risk to the Council (such as legal, budgetary and timescales) of taking/not taking the action is included with the Forward Plan to allow Members and the public to assess the importance of the topics contained in the plan.

It has been agreed that the Review Committee will examine the Forward Plan on a regular basis and will provide its input to various issues to the Executive Board prior to them making their decision. To this end the Team feel that the examination of the Forward Plan should be a regular item on its Agenda. (Note: this has already been implemented.)

Recommendation No 14

It is recommended that the Forward Plan is added as a standing item on the Review Committee Agenda to allow Members of the Committee to indicate which items they wish to overview and have input into prior to the scheduled Executive Board meeting.

To aid Member's knowledge when important decisions are being made and to provide a necessary check and balance to the operation of the Executive Board the team feel that a copy of the Forward Plan should be sent to all Members each month after it has been updated. (Note: this has already been implemented.)

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

Recommendation No 15

It is recommended to the Executive Board that a copy of the Forward Plan is sent to all Members on a monthly basis once it has been updated.

From the responses to the Member's questionnaires and from the team's discussions with the Area Committee Chairmen it was felt that there needed to be a clearer way for the Area Committee Chairmen to report back to the Executive Board from their meetings.

Recommendation No 16

It is recommended to the Executive Board that there be a standing item on the Executive Board meeting agenda for Area Committee Chairmen to report back on the Area Committee meetings.

The following recommendations have already been implemented during the year.

The Review Committee agreed on the 17 July 2007 that an attendance sheet would be provided at all future Area Committee meetings to record the details of members of the public who attended the meeting in order that their views could be obtained at a later date.

Recommendation No 17

It is recommended to the Executive Board that signing sheets are introduced for the public attendees of the Area Committees in order that their views can be sought regarding possible changes etc.

It was recognised in the responses to the first questionnaire sent out in September 2007 that sound was an issue at these meetings. Members and the public both said they had difficulty in hearing the proceedings and, therefore, it was recommended that a sound system be arranged for all future Area Committee meetings.

Recommendation No 18

It is recommended to the Executive Board that a sound system be introduced at all Area Committee meetings and that all speakers, whether Members, officers or the public, use the equipment provided.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

During the Review, as part of the examination of the operation of the Executive Board, the project team looked at certain issues that had occurred with one of the Council's consultations. The reasons for the situation were examined and the team have added a recommendation to the report to avoid similar circumstances in the future.

Recommendation No 19

It is recommended to the Executive Board that all Council divisions:-

- Co-ordinate public consultations to avoid timing clashes.
- Ensure that all consultees are contacted at the same time

In light of the Councils' response to the Peer Review and the experience of the Review Committee Members this year, the team felt that a specialised and dedicated training programme for the Review Committee Members would be of benefit. This would cover:-

- Scrutinising finance
- Scrutiny and performance
- Weighing evidence
- Communications skills for scrutiny

Recommendation No 20

It is recommended to the Standards Committee that a structured training programme be organised for all Councillors who are appointed to the Review Committee in order that the work of the Committee can be progressed in a timely and efficient manner. (Note: this was agreed by the Standards Committee on 12 March 2008).

During the Review it was recognised that the nature of the Area Committees are different to the other Committee meetings that Members attend. During the meeting in January 2008 with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Executive Board the suggestion of additional training for the Area Committee Chairmen was made. The team feel that this suggestion is worthy of adding to its recommendations.

Recommendation No 21

It is recommended to the Standards Committee that a training course on handling public meetings is offered to the Area Chairmen and Vice Chairmen to assist them in their roles. (Note: this was agreed by the Standards Committee on 12 March 2008).

Appendix 1



**Rochford District
Council**

..... Area Committee

agenda

Date

[Enter Date]

Time

**7.30 pm for the Community Forum,
which will be followed by the formal
Committee meeting**

Place

[Enter Address]

(See map overleaf)

**The public are welcome to attend
this meeting. There is an
opportunity for the public to ask
questions to Members of the
Area Committee in the
Community Forum (see overleaf
for how to do this)**

Contact

John Bostock

Rochford District Council
South Street
Rochford
Essex
SS4 1BW

Tel: (01702) 546366

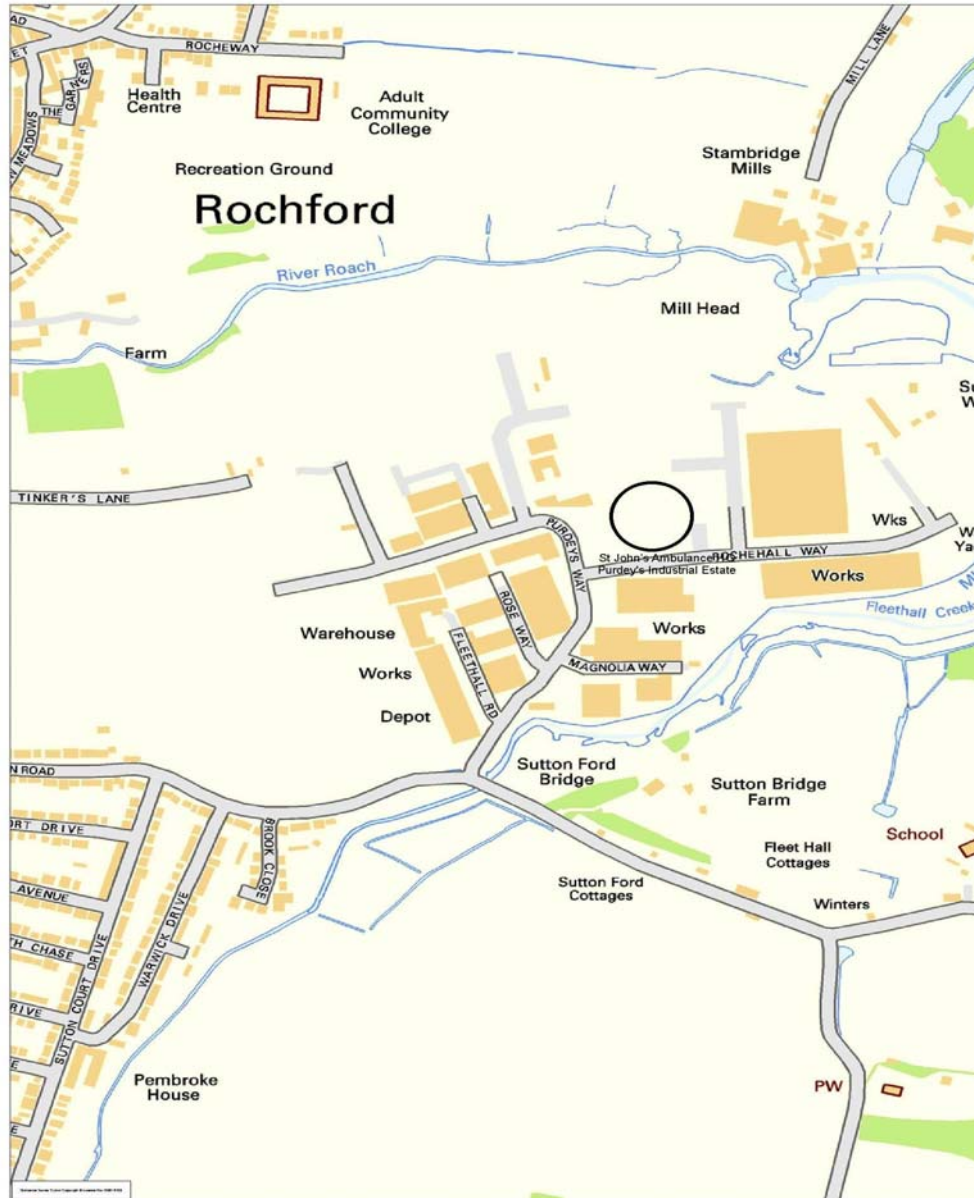
Fax: (01702) 545737

Email: committee@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this agenda in large print, braille or
another language please contact 01702 546366
The agendas and minutes of meetings can be accessed
via the Council's website at <http://www.rochford.gov.uk>



REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE



Directions

- At the Anne Boleyn roundabout on Southend Road, coming out of Rochford, turn left into Sutton Road.
- At the first mini roundabout, turn left into Purdeys Way.
- Just past the Homebase store, turn right into Rochehall Way.
- The St John Ambulance Headquarters building is situated on the left-hand side, opposite Homebase. You can either park in the HQ car park, or in the Homebase car park, or in Rochehall Way.
- Enter the building via the main entrance and take the stairs to the first floor.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

How the public can ask questions in the Community Forum

- Any questions you would like to raise at the Area Committee can be put forward during the Community Forum part of the meeting.
- To get your question asked you must fill in a request form before the start of the Area Committee meeting. Forms can be found on the Council's website at www.rochford.gov.uk (under Council and Democracy/Area Committees) or obtained by email from committee@rochford.gov.uk or by telephone on 01702 318141. The website has an online form or a form for downloading and either emailing to committee@rochford.gov.uk or posting to the Committee Section, Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW. Alternatively, completed forms can be handed in to Council officers just prior to the start of the meeting (at which blank forms will also be available).
- At any one meeting no person and/or organisation may submit more than 2 questions.
- In the Community Forum, if there is a high volume of questions these may be summarised and a sample answered at the meeting.
- A question may be rejected if it:-
 1. is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the district;
 2. is defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
 3. is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Area Committee in the past six months;
 4. requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.
- Time permitting, we will try to answer as many questions as possible at the meeting, but we cannot guarantee to do so as we may not have all the information to hand.
- Ordinarily one supplementary question may be allowed to any written question but this is subject to the Chairman's discretion. The supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the response. Supplementary questions may be rejected on any of the grounds mentioned above.
- Any questions raised up to seven working days before the date of a meeting will receive a written response at the meeting. All other questions raised will get a full response. (Note:- the details of how this will be achieved is dependant on acceptance of report recommendation No 2.)

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

Terms of Reference

- To identify the needs of the Community through consultation and to involve the community and other appropriate bodies and advise the Executive Board as appropriate on such issues.
- To seek agreement from the Executive Board for changes to services to meet local needs that are outside the immediate responsibility and/or budget of the Area Committee in respect of, for example, refuse collection, street cleansing, Environmental maintenance, Grounds maintenance, Local parks and playing fields, Children's play areas, including seeking agreement for revenue and capital expenditure to meet any changes.
- To monitor local service delivery and to consider the outcome of such monitoring, advising the Executive Board and the Review Committee as appropriate.
- To make arrangements for the provision of information about local services and other information to people in the area.
- To act as a Community Forum where the Area Committee and members of the community can discuss issues of concern to them, such issues to include matters that are the direct responsibility of the Council and other issues that are the responsibility of other organisations.
- To exercise delegated authority with regard to Council functions in respect of power to create, stop up and divert footpaths and bridleways, designate cycle tracks and any other Council functions as may be delegated to it by Full Council.
- To exercise delegated authority with regard to Local Choice functions as outlined in Part C to Part 3 of the Council's Constitution.
- To exercise any executive functions as may be delegated to it by the Executive Board.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION
MAKING STRUCTURE

Members of the Area Committee

**District
Representatives**

Chairman:
Vice-Chairman:

**Parish
Representatives**

Other Representatives

Essex Police
Essex County Council

Community Forum (to commence at 7.30pm)

This is an opportunity for all Members of the Area Committee, including representatives from Essex Police and Essex County Highways, to respond to questions and issues from members of the public

Formal Meeting (to commence after the Community Forum)

A G E N D A

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 Minutes of the Meeting held on [Enter Date]**
- 3 To Receive Declarations of Interest**
- 4 Football Pitches at Sweyne Park**

To consider the report from the Head of Community Services seeking views on the use of Football Pitches at Sweyne Park

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION
MAKING STRUCTURE

5 Area Progress on decisions

To receive and note the updates on matters raised at
previous meetings of theArea Committee

**6 Matters Arising from the Executive Board/Issues to
Refer to the Executive Board.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Warren', with a large, stylized initial 'P'.

Paul Warren
Chief Executive

Dates and Venues for Future Meetings

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

Appendix 2

How the public can ask questions in the Community Forum

- Any questions you would like to raise at the Area Committee can be put forward during the Community Forum part of the meeting.
- To get your question asked you must fill in a request form before the start of the Area Committee meeting. Forms can be found on the Council's website at www.rochford.gov.uk (under Council and Democracy/Area Committees) or obtained by email from committee@rochford.gov.uk or by telephone on 01702 318141. The website has an online form or a form for downloading and either emailing to committee@rochford.gov.uk or posting to the Committee Section, Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW. Alternatively, completed forms can be handed in to Council officers just prior to the start of the meeting (at which blank forms will also be available).
- At any one meeting no person and/or organisation may submit more than 2 questions.
- In the Community Forum, if there is a high volume of questions these may be summarised and a sample answered at the meeting.
- A question may be rejected if it:-
 1. is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the district;
 2. is defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
 3. is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Area Committee in the past six months;
 4. requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.
- Time permitting, we will try to answer as many questions as possible at the meeting, but we cannot guarantee to do so as we may not have all the information to hand.
- Ordinarily one supplementary question may be allowed to any written question but this is subject to the Chairman's discretion. The supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the response. Supplementary questions may be rejected on any of the grounds mentioned above.
- Any questions raised up to seven working days before the date of a meeting will receive a written response at the meeting. All other questions raised will get a full response. (Note:- the details of how this will be achieved is dependant on acceptance of report recommendation No 2.)

Appendix 3

Role Profile for Parish/Town Councillors who are Members of an Area Committee

Key Actions

1. To attend Area Committee meetings as a representative of the Parish/Town Council , to answer questions from the public on behalf of the Parish/Town Council and use local knowledge to discuss issues raised by the public.
2. As representatives of the Parish/Town Council invited to the meeting to raise questions during formal Committee business.
3. To arrange for a standing item to be included on the Parish/Town Council's Agenda in order that they can update their colleagues on the issues raised at the Area Committee meetings and the responses received /given.

Note:- The Community Forum element of the Area Committee is a facility for members of the public to raise questions with Members of the Committee.

If a Parish/Town Councillor who is representing their Parish/Town Council on the Area Committee wishes to raise general questions on the work of the District or County these should be asked via their Clerk or through direct contact with District/County Members and /or via the officers of both organisations.

Appendix 4

Guidance for District Council Members on Area Committees

How to get an item on Agenda

A matter can only be considered by an Area Committee if it falls within the Terms of Reference of the Committee, which are set out below.

If a Member wishes to suggest an item for consideration at an Area Committee they should contact either the Area Committee Chairman, Area Committee Vice Chairman or the Lead Officer. All items suggested will be considered at the Agenda planning stage in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.

How to get an item referred to the Executive Board

An item can be referred from an Area Committee to the Executive Board if the Area Committee agrees that this is appropriate during a meeting.

How to raise questions

The Community Forum element of the Area Committee is a facility for the public to raise questions with Members of the Committee. In their community leadership role, Members will answer questions and use local knowledge to discuss the questions raised.

Members of an Area Committee can raise questions during the formal business element of the meeting as appropriate. Members also have other avenues for asking questions such as through direct contact with the Committee Chairman, officers and Members of the Executive Board.

Area Committee Terms of Reference

- To identify the needs of the community through consultation and to involve the community and other appropriate bodies and advise the Executive Board as appropriate on such issues.
- To seek agreement from the Executive Board for changes to services to meet local needs that are outside the immediate responsibility and/or budget of the Area Committee in respect of, for example, refuse collection, street cleansing, Environmental maintenance, Grounds maintenance, Local parks and playing fields, Children's play areas, including seeking agreement for revenue and capital expenditure to

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE NEW POLITICAL DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE

meet any changes.

- To monitor local service delivery and to consider the outcome of such monitoring, advising the Executive Board and the Review Committee as appropriate.
- To make arrangements for the provision of information about local services and other information to people in the area.
- To act as a Community Forum where the Area Committee and members of the community can discuss issues of concern to them, such issues to include matters that are the direct responsibility of the Council and other issues that are the responsibility of other organisations.
- To exercise delegated authority with regard to Council functions in respect of power to create, stop up and divert footpaths and bridleways, designate cycle tracks and any other Council functions as may be delegated to it by Full Council.
- To exercise delegated authority with regard to Local Choice functions as outlined in Part C to Part 3 of the Council's Constitution.
- To exercise any executive functions as may be delegated to it by the Executive Board.