

PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

3. COUNCIL SIZE

3.1 BACKGROUND

3.1.1 The Review of Local Government in Cambridgeshire took place in 1998. The population of the two new authorities was:

New Cambridgeshire 542,900 - *59 Councillors*

Peterborough 152,900 - *57 Councillors*

Total for Old Cambridgeshire had it still existed 695,800 - 77 Councillors

3.1.2 Cambridgeshire is one of the fastest growing counties in the country, with some 70% of population growth due to inward migration. It had an estimated population of 553,600 in mid-2001, an increase of more than 4,000 each year for the past 10 years. It is estimated that by 2016 another 85,000 people will be living in the county.

3.1.3 The Council adopted and implemented its new constitution with effect from 15th May 2001. It moved to a Cabinet system of governance based on the main components of the structure detailed below, and other groups.

3.2 CABINET

3.2.1 The Cabinet consists of the Leader together with nine Councillors. Each Cabinet Member is assigned a portfolio. Cabinet meets at least ten times per year. Meetings of Cabinet/SMT (Strategic Management Team) are also held approximately fourteen times a year.

3.2.2 A report prepared for the Interim Scheme of Members' Allowances detailing experience over 1999/00 and 2000/01 showed that 'average' leading Members (i.e. in receipt of an Special Responsibility Allowance because of their additional responsibilities) attended meetings on approximately 75 days a year.

3.2.3 The use of attendance allowances paid to calculate attendances tends to understate the time commitment because only attendance eligible for allowances was recorded. Members also commit time for which allowances were no longer payable. This was particularly the case for leading Members.

3.2.4 The report estimated under the new arrangements that an 'average' leading Member would devote some 80 to 90 days per annum to Council business. (This equates to a 7 - 20% increase in the number of days per annum devoted by an 'average' leading Member to Council business.) However, averages mask wide variations for individual Members: for example, the Leader of the Council may need to devote more days compared to a minor portfolio holder.

3.3 SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

- 3.3.1 The Council has four scrutiny committees dealing with Environment and Transport, Health and Social Care, Education, Libraries and Heritage, and Policy to discharge the functions conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000. The Policy Scrutiny Committee also acts as the Council's Audit Committee. The Council can also appoint up to three ad-hoc Scrutiny Panels, for a fixed period, as and when necessary.
- 3.3.2 Scrutiny Committees comprise seven County Councillors (and cannot include Cabinet Members and opposition Spokesmen for that service). They meet approximately seven times a year. Extraordinary meetings can be called from time to time as and when appropriate. They have their own work programme. The Council is encouraging Scrutiny Committees to meet away from Shire Hall (Headquarters based in Cambridge) more frequently and to seek input from a wider range of sources. This will require additional work between meetings resulting in an increase demand on member time.
- 3.3.3 Four standing scrutiny chairman have been appointed. Together with three other Councillors they form a Scrutiny Management Committee to manage the whole scrutiny process. This meets three times a year.
- 3.3.4 Continuity of membership is very important in developing scrutiny. The use of substitutes and changes of membership therefore do not enhance the effectiveness of the scrutiny function.
- 3.3.5 A report prepared for the Interim Scheme of Members' Allowances estimated that Scrutiny Chairs spend 38 special responsibility days on scrutiny and 36 days on ordinary Councillor duties. Their role has been recognised with the introduction of a Special Responsibility Allowance.
- 3.3.6 The number of Member Led Reviews and ad-hoc scrutiny Panels, which require Member input and the extent of Member input into these meetings was unclear when the Constitution was approved. In practice, at any one time each Scrutiny Committee usually has one Member Led Review in progress and there is one ad hoc scrutiny panel running. The investigative style of these groups means that they can be more time-consuming for the members involved than membership of the parent Committee.

3.4 HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY

3.4.1 The Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee oversees a number of bodies which will be responsible for carrying out health scrutiny, as enabled by Section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, and scrutiny of Social Services. These bodies are:

- Four Area Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panels have been established based on Primary Care Trust boundaries. Each Panel comprises four County Councillors (except for East Cambridgeshire and Fenland, which comprises five). Cabinet members are not allowed to serve on these Panels.

- A Social Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee comprising the seven County Councillors on the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee has also been established to scrutinise Social Services matters internal to the County Council.
- Ad hoc working groups may be established to address specific issues, as appropriate.

3.4.2 The new power of health scrutiny came into effect on 1st January 2003. At this stage it is expected that:

- The Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee will meet seven times a year.
- The four Area Health Scrutiny Panels will meet four times a year.
- The Social Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee will meet seven times a year.

3.4.3 As in 3.3.6, it is difficult to predict the number of ad hoc reviews which may need to be undertaken.

3.5 SERVICE DEVELOPMENT GROUPS (SDGs)

3.5.1 There are eleven permanent SDGs (non-executive advisory groups) established to provide a focus at member level for co-ordination of a range of specified services and functions of the Council. They comprise nine members and are chaired by a Cabinet Member for the relevant portfolio. They meet approximately six times a year. Any Member can attend an SDG as an observer and local members are invited when a local patch issue is to be discussed.

3.5.2 The Council for the first time in January 2003 held Budget Advisory Panels for each of the four Directorate areas. This provided an opportunity for SDG Members from the relevant service area to focus and comment on the Council's budget. These Panels now meet twice yearly in November and January and are Chaired by the Cabinet Member for the relevant portfolio. Panels vary in size with some comprising 13 members and others 21.

3.5.3 An extensive budget consultation exercise is undertaken every January. This involves two public consultation meetings held in the evening and four library "drop in" sessions held on Saturdays. These meetings are very successful with members of the public taking the opportunity to raise issues of concern with Group Leaders or their representatives. Meetings are also held with the voluntary sector, Trades Unions and Local Councils.

3.6 PARTNERSHIPS

Local Strategic Partnerships

3.6.1 The Council is represented by one County Councillor Cabinet Member on each district area Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), and, in the case of the Cambridge LSP, an additional Liberal Democrat Councillor. County Councillors have also been appointed to the theme groups of Huntingdonshire LSP. It is anticipated that they are likely to be involved in the theme groups of

the other LSPs in the future. The LSPs are currently meeting on a bi-monthly basis to agree a Community Strategy for each area.

'In Your Patch' Meetings

3.6.2 The role of Local Members in relation to LSPs is currently being promoted through 'In Your Patch' meetings. These meetings take place in each district four times a year and provide an opportunity for Local Members to discuss issues on a district basis.

Cambridge Sub Regional Implementation Stakeholder Partnership

3.6.3 The Partnership comprises three County Councillor Cabinet Members and meets every three months. It oversees the work of the Officer Steering Group, which is responsible for providing a strategic steer for several themed task groups and ensuring effective links between the task groups and member/stakeholder processes.

Other Partnerships

3.6.4 The Council is currently involved in numerous partnership arrangements throughout the County. The involvement of Councillors in these arrangements has increased over the years. Councillors have been appointed to represent the Council on 147 outside bodies. Recent appointments have included the following:

- Connexions Partnership Board
- Cambridgeshire Learning Partnership
- Learning Disabilities Partnership Board

Councillors are also likely to be invited to serve on Countryside Access Fora arising from the requirements of the Countryside Act 2000.

Service integration with partner agencies, for example Social Services and Health, is likely to involve the delivery of services on a partnership basis. This is likely to result in Councillor representation on new partnership bodies.

3.7 OTHER GROUPS

Adult Partnership Board

3.7.1 The Board was established in October 2001. It comprises the three Social Services Spokesmen and meets four times a year.

Cambridgeshire Schools Forum

3.7.2 Regulations made under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 required Local Education Authorities to establish a Forum by 15 January 2003. The Forum must be consulted on issues relating to schools funding formula, certain contracts and a number of financial issues. It comprises four County Councillors and meets at a minimum once every half term.

Joint Planning Lead Member Group & Joint Transport Lead Member Group

3.7.3 These Groups comprise one County Councillor Cabinet Member and meet approximately four times a year.

SMT/Labour and SMT/Lib Dem Spokes

3.7.4 These are completely new Groups, which were set up as part of the Council's constitutional arrangements, to enable the opposition Councillors to discuss issues with Strategic Management Team (SMT). The original Constitution may have envisaged a combined /opposition spokes meeting. The Lib Democrat Group requested separate meetings. There are therefore five extra meetings a year resulting from the separate meetings.

Resources Spokes

3.7.5 Resources Spokes were established as part of changes to the new IPM arrangements. Three County Councillors meet eleven times a year. There are also Spokes arrangements for Education, Libraries and Heritage, Environment and Transport, and Social Services, which have been in operation for many years.

Working Groups

3.7.6 Currently these are: Children's and Adult Services Review Member Working Group; Internal Political Management Working Group; Corporate Performance Assessment Member Group; and Periodic Electoral Review Working Group. These adhoc groups are time limited and meet as required.

3.8 BACKBENCH MEMBERS

3.8.1 The Interim Scheme of Members' Allowances report identified that an 'average' backbench member had attended Council meetings on approximately 44 days of the year in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. Comparing the increase for an 'average' leading member, this results in a 15% increase for an 'average' backbench member equating to approximately 51 days.

3.8.2 The recent Corporate Assessment (CPA) reported that the new political structures, combined with the best of the pre-existing advisory forms, had contributed to developing and focusing members' decision making. However, backbench members do not challenge cabinet or officers sufficiently.

3.8.3 The CPA Improvement Plan has recommended further development of the member development programme, further training in the scrutiny process and expanded call-in by scrutiny committees to increase the involvement of, and internal challenge by, backbench members.

3.8.4 The Council has introduced a corporate seminar programme to improve and enhance information flows/levels of awareness particularly of backbench members. Seminars are held on a monthly basis. This does not preclude Directorates or SDGs from holding ad hoc seminars on key issues.

3.9 COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

- 3.9.1 As outlined in 3.8.2, the CPA commented positively on Cambridgeshire's new political structures.
- 3.9.2 Personal Development Plans (PDPs) were introduced for all Members to help them identify activity that they want to do in order to assist their continuous development as a successful Councillor. Approximately thirteen Councillors have PDPs. The CPA identifies that personal development planning has not been followed up vigorously enough. This situation should be rectified with the appointment of a new Organisation Development Manager.
- 3.9.3 The CPA also commented on the Council's open and collaborative approach to its community partners, including district, parish and town councils, health, police, voluntary sector and business leaders. The Council is clear that partnership working is key to making the most of scarce resources while moving services closer to users. Consequently, this has led to an increase in the number of partnerships requiring Councillor representatives (see 3.6.4).

3.10 REPRESENTATIONAL AND COMMUNITY ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

- 3.10.1 Democratic Services has recently undertaken a survey of Member Training using questionnaires and 1:1 interviews. As part of this survey, it was identified that Members primarily rely on newsletters to keep in touch with their constituents. Surgeries work well when held regularly on a cross-organisation/council basis in a high profile venue. Some Members had experienced disappointing attendances at surgeries particularly those serving rural areas. Many would welcome assistance in setting them up.
- 3.10.2 There is anecdotal evidence that Councillors receive an increasing amount of e-mail from the public. The survey identified an increasing use of personal or party websites to respond to the demand for E-Government and that some Members, with appropriate assistance, would consider setting them up.
- 3.10.3 Members of the Periodic Electoral Review (PER) Working Group have also highlighted the increasing impact of district and parish council activities on their role as a County Councillor. The increase in consultation by County and District authorities has subsequently resulted in an increase in workload. Members representing rural parishes also highlighted the fact that they were expected to attend more meetings locally.
- 3.10.4 Given the increasing number of commitments for both Executive and Non-Executive Councillors, the most effective way for all Councillors to engage with their local communities is to increase the total number of Councillors in Cambridgeshire. The representational role of Councillors is key. They need to build upon this role and become more involved than previously in acting on behalf of the County Council at local level. However, the development of this role will inevitably place further demands on them if the Council is to engage with local communities. This is particularly the case for Councillors in full-time employment and who are also members of District Councils.

3.11 CONCLUSION

- 3.11.1 The Council believes, based on the information detailed above, that the average workload of each Councillor is greater than it was prior to the implementation of the Local Government Act 2000. It has been increasing steadily over the last decade or so.
- 3.11.2 The availability and use of modern technology has helped Councillors to meet the demands of an increased workload. However, it has, in some cases, resulted in a significant increase in correspondence from constituents and Council officers with unrealistic demands for an immediate response. If Councillors are to engage effectively with their local electors, parish councils and community groups, the total number of Councillors on the Council will need to increase to enable the current workload burden to be spread more evenly.
- 3.11.3 The Council therefore considers that a 15% increase in the number of Councillors is needed to meet the impact of these changes. This percentage increase, which equates to an increase to 68 Councillors from 59, has formed the basis of the Council's informal consultation on its PER.