

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE 2 JULY 1998

NOTE: Full copies of the reports mentioned below have been sent to members of the Policy Committee and other members who have requested them. Further copies are, however, available from Janet Purcell, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Telephone: 01992 555562)

1. MEMBER STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES: THE WORK OF COMMISSIONS, TASK GROUPS AND PANELS

1.1 Background

During 1997 a review of member processes was undertaken. One of its objectives was to enable members to develop policy on some of the key issues that cross service boundaries and which are difficult to address within the conventional committee structure. One of the outcomes of the review was the establishment, in July 1997, of five Commissions, each comprising 15 members of the Council and each focusing on a key theme;-

- Communities
- Early Childhood
- Economic Development & Anti-Poverty
- Green County
- Young People

The Council also established a Scrutiny & Audit Panel, and created task groups and standing panels to combine previously separated roles of policy development and performance scrutiny.

These developments built upon earlier changes to member processes, based on principles of handling cross service work more effectively; minimising duplication of reporting; streamlining the committee structure to delete all but a few sub-committees; and progressing policy development and review within smaller member bodies.

1.2 Overview of Commissions

Each commission is now focusing on four or five areas. Some are working on themes simultaneously, using member sub groups (e.g. Green County, Economic Development & Anti Poverty) others are phasing in their programmes taking each topic to the whole body (e.g. Early Childhood).

Commissions have limited funding to support their activities. In terms of administration each has a lead officer, committee support, and an officer support group from a range of services. The extent to which they access the County Council's overall resources in developing their strategies and programmes varies. Some have dedicated spending programmes utilising former Cross Service Issues monies; others have stronger links to mainstream service budgets. Constitutionally commissions 'influence' committee budgets, and this will emerge during the forthcoming cycle of budget planning for the Council.

All commissions have power to co-opt. To date only the Early Childhood Commission have done so, co-opting from each of Hertfordshire's two Health Authorities.

Commissions set their own timetable of meetings, which has so far been preferred to integrating into the Council's overall annual business programme

Some meetings of commissions have taken place around the county with the aim of engaging other agencies, partners, and the public at large.

The Early Childhood Commission have conducted workshop sessions for parents to develop policy on information services; and the Economic Development and Anti Poverty Commission have used a series of site visits to develop their thinking. Where commissions meet in formal session, predominantly involving members and officers of the County Council, then meetings take place at County Hall.

1.3 Panels and Task Groups

The structure adopted last year abolished policy panels and performance review panels, creating a single Scrutiny & Audit Panel and a number of so called standing panels and task groups reporting to a parent committee. Two further panels have been created by the Policy Committee on 2 July (see item 2 of this report), to tackle the important issues of health and crime and disorder/community safety.

1.4 Committee Memberships/Reporting of Business to the Council

The current Scheme of Delegation to Committees restricts the membership of sub-committees (except those of Policy Committee) to members of their parent committee. The Committee feel that this is inflexible and recommend that the Scheme be amended to allow any member to be a member of a sub-committee regardless of whether that member is on the parent committee:-

The Committee also recommend changes to Standing Orders and procedures to facilitate the reporting of items from committees to the Council.

1.5 Recommendations

(1) That the Scheme of Delegation to Committees be amended so that the constitution of each of the following sub-committees refers to 'members of the Council' in place of 'members of the committee':

- Education Operations and Cases Sub-Committees.
- Environment Cases Sub-Committee.
- Social Services Operations and Cases and Appeals Sub-Committees.

(2) That Standing order of Committees C6 (Voting) be amended so that the last paragraph reads:

'(7) At a committee meeting, the Leader of the Opposition or a spokesperson nominated by the Leader may require one identified item to be reported from the committee meeting to the Council. Otherwise, a report on an item shall be made to the Council if so determined by the committee or required by the Chairman.'

(3) That paragraph 8.1 of the Procedures for the Conduct of Business be amended to read:

'8.1 Reports of Committees to Council shall be limited to:

- matters which by law require a decision by the Council
- items which the Committee have decided to refer
- items which the Chairman of the Committee requires to be referred
- one item which the Opposition Leader or spokesperson requires to be referred
- items added by the County Secretary as worthy of report.'

2. CRIME AND DISORDER BILL AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Crime and Disorder Bill, which will receive Royal Assent in July 1998 and become law in September, encompasses community safety, crime and disorder partnerships, youth crime, racial harassment, anti-social behaviour orders, together with a range of orders to deal with post offending.

The bill has two main elements, namely the establishment of responsible authorities at district council level and of youth offending teams across the County.

2.1 Responsible Authorities

As a result of the Crime and Disorder Bill the District Councils, the County Council and the Chief Officer of Police, become responsible authorities, each having a statutory duty to reduce crime in the district council areas.

The three responsible authorities are now establishing relationships across the county. The ten groupings must conduct a review of crime in their area, consult with the public, then publish and deliver on a three year strategy to tackle the issues identified in the audit and consultation process. Each group is answerable to the Home Secretary regarding the success of the strategies, which must be in place by 1 April 1999.

The Committee noted that relationships between the three responsible authorities will be assisted by the Home Secretary's recent decision to bring together the boundaries of the County and the Hertfordshire Police Authority from 1 April 2000.

2.2 Youth Offending Teams

The Crime and Disorder Bill also places a duty on the County Council to establish youth offending teams across the County, comprising officers from Social Services, Education, Health, Probation and the Police, who will administer the orders, action plans and warnings that will be introduced through the Bill and will be answerable to a newly established National Youth Justice Board. The proposed launch date for these teams is 1 April 2000. The Director of Social Services has formed a multi-agency working group to lead on implementation.

It is important that the work and structures of the Youth Offending Teams and the district responsible authorities complement each other so that the identified local objectives can be achieved.

2.3 Chief Officer Group on Criminal Justice

The Chief Officer Group on Criminal Justice will take responsibility for the strategic management of the Crime and Disorder Bill across the County, chaired by the Chief Executive of the County Council. Membership will include the Chief Constable, Chief Probation Officer, the Directors of Education and Social Services and two District Chief Executives.

The work of group will be supported by a new strategic partnership

comprised of officers from County, Districts, Police, Probation, Social Services and Education.

2.4 *The Role of Members*

A key issue has been the role of members, at both County and District level, in the implementation of the Bill. The County Council has had a number of bodies with oversight for aspects of the new bill and community safety. This situation is not sustainable as we move towards the implementation of the Act, as it results in double handling and focuses member attention on limited areas of activity.

The Committee have therefore agreed to establish a task group of 9 members (chaired by County Councillor R Sanderson) to oversee the implementation of the County Council's approach to the Crime and Disorder Act and community safety. The task group will report to the Policy Committee in September. There will also be a seminar every six months (starting in September) which will bring together District and County members, and members of Police Authority, Probation Committee and the Health Authorities.

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Chairman

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2 July 1998