

<b>STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 8</b>
<b>7 MARCH 2012</b>	<b>Public Report</b>

## **Report of the Neighbourhood Committee Review Implementation Task and Finish Group**

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### **INTERIM REPORT OF RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES**

#### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This report identifies a key recommendation from the work of the Task and Finish Group that, if adopted, will have constitutional implications, and so is being brought ahead of Annual Council to enable full discussion and debate through the appropriate democratic process.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Committee are asked to consider the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group that:
- There are seven Neighbourhood Committee chairmen, one for each Neighbourhood Committee
  - The Chairman of each Neighbourhood Committee represents a ward from within the area covered by that Neighbourhood Committee
  - The total Special Responsibility Allowance budget for Chairmen of Neighbourhood Committees remains at its current value, but is divided equally amongst all seven Chairmen
  - These changes take effect from the start of the new Municipal Year 2012

#### **3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

- 3.1 Neighbourhood Committees are a key component of delivering a localism approach to service design, delivery and decision making. They have continued to improve and evolve throughout the life of the Task and Finish Group, and now consider, or have the potential to consider, a very broad range of locally important issues that cut across the entire Sustainable Community Strategy.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 In March 2011, the Neighbourhood Committee Review Task and Finish Group, established by this Committee, concluded its work and reported back to Committee on its findings. One of the recommendations at that time was that the Review Group continues as a Task and Finish Group but to oversee the implementation of those recommendations that were agreed.
- 4.2 Since that time, the Task and Finish Group has been working closely with officers to oversee the implementation and further development of agreed recommendations, and has identified further areas for continued improvement that will help embed Neighbourhood Committees even further into the democratic decision making processes of the council.
- 4.3 A full report will be presented to the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in June 2012, which will: (i) review the implementation of the agreed recommendations of the Review Group from 2011; and (ii) make further recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Committees.

4.4 However, as one of the recommendations that the Task and Finish Group wishes to make is a constitutional matter, this interim report is being presented at the March Scrutiny Committee meeting in order to allow time for discussion at Cabinet ahead of Annual Council in May.

## **5. KEY ISSUES**

5.1 As part of its deliberations and discussions, the Task and Finish Group has considered the effectiveness of the current arrangements for chairing Neighbourhood Committees. There are currently four Chairmen covering seven Neighbourhood Committees.

5.2 Members of the Task and Finish Group have attended a number of Neighbourhood Committee meetings outside their own ward areas to gain a better understanding of how the Committees are operating across Peterborough. One of the main focuses for this work was to determine how relevant very local knowledge of ward/neighbourhood issues was in relation to how the meeting is led.

5.3 The Task and Finish Group found that in Neighbourhood Committee meetings where the Chairman was also representing a ward in the same area, there was significantly richer and more productive debate and decision making than in Committees where this was not the case. In part, the Task and Finish Group concluded that this was because of the local, relevant knowledge the Chairman had of the issues affecting the audience. However, they also concluded that the public and partners who attended the meetings where the Chairman represented a ward in the same area were much more positive about the meeting because they knew or recognised the Chairman from their ward work so related to them at a local level more effectively.

5.4 This is significantly evidenced by the growing success of the Rural Neighbourhood Committee, which, following the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group in 2011, is now chaired by a councillor representing a rural ward. Agendas and debates have become much more relevant and focussed on the issues affecting rural communities.

5.5 The experience of Task and Finish Group members when attending other Neighbourhood Committee meetings was also that the meetings were most successful when they debated issues of real, local concern. These were felt to be the issues that the Chairman should have good knowledge of so that they can manage the meeting well whilst maintaining a broad view of all factors.

5.6 For these reasons, the Task and Finish Group are recommending that each Neighbourhood Committee should have its own Chairman, appointed from a ward within the area represented by that Neighbourhood Committee.

5.7 The Task and Finish Group recognises the important role that the Chairmen need to play in delivering an effective Neighbourhood Committee, and so are recommending that the Special Responsibility Allowance total budget is maintained at its current level, but that the budget is equally divided amongst the seven Chairmen.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The Task and Finish Group are confident that this important change will help to further develop Neighbourhood Committees as the important decision making forum for communities across Peterborough.

The Task and Finish Group are not anticipating any financial implications because the recommendation is to limit the SRA total budget for the role of Chairman at its current value.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The Task and Finish Group have consulted widely throughout its deliberations with councillors, members of the public and partner agencies, and more details of the outcomes of this consultation will be presented in the full report in June 2012.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 If the Scrutiny Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group, the recommendation will be made to Cabinet at its next meeting.

## **9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 None.

## **10. APPENDICES**

- 10.1 None.

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