

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

POLITICAL STRUCTURE WORKING PARTY

held in the Council Chamber, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough
20th February 2001
commencing at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillors: Hadley (Chair), Bladon, Mrs Blenkinsopp, Nrewer, Mrs Derrick, Fewkes, Fort, Hallam, Hart, Hubbard, Mrs Jones, King, Mrs King, Liquorish, Mrs Page, Mrs Roeber, Mrs Simpson, Taylor and Williams

Apologies were received from Councillors: Dunton, Fuchs, Mrs Jackel, Pearse, Totten and Vickers

MODERNISING YOUR COUNCIL

Judi Billing, a Consultant from the IDEA, addressed the Working Party on the changes proposed by the Local Government Act 2000. In particular the requirement for visible, effective and accountable decision making. Ms Billing detailed the four decision making options open to Councils with a population of less than 85,000. Following the presentation a discussion took place on the current decision making structure.

Councillor Williams stated that there was some apprehension about the new structure, in particular a lack of involvement for "back benchers". The question was posed about times of meetings and whether day time meetings were an issue in trying to recruit new Councillors, particularly younger Councillors.

Councillor Hallam considered that the Councillor's role in representing the District should not be lost as part of any new structure and it was important that this role was maintained.

Councillor Roeber raised the issue of the role of Council in particular the lack of debate at Council meetings. She considered that Full Council needed to be more challenging and the Council should decide the role that Full Council meetings should take.

Councillor Hart raised the potential for Task Panels to become part of the Scrutiny role by assuming a pre-Scrutiny initiative.

Councillor Taylor had experienced frustration in engaging in decision making procedures, in particular times of meetings had inhibited his participation. He considered that reports had become less comprehensive under the new structure. These shorter reports might create difficulties for the press and public who were not involved sufficiently to understand the level of debate. He considered that the five minutes "cut off" at Council could also stifle debate. Councillor Taylor raised the issue of political parties involvement in choosing the Executive and Scrutiny and the need for Council to take a role in choosing Executive and Scrutiny Members. He also considered that more than one Scrutiny Board would engage a greater number of Councillors in the Scrutiny process.

Councillor Bladon stated that the development of the current structure allowed for a massive amount of change which was not necessarily available under the fourth option. He said that Council had improved but there was still room for further improvement and as a portfolio holder he would expect more questions to be put to him at the Full Council meeting.

With regard to the Consultation on the four decision making options, Councillor Brewer asked whether the Council could be made to do the Consultation again. He was assured that if the DETR were unhappy that the approach was not neutral then it had powers to demand further Consultation. The Consultation could also be challenged through the Courts.

TALKBACK CONSULTATION

Councillors made comments and changes to the draft Consultation text.

The meeting finished at 8.45 p.m.