

Responses to the LGA Peer Review

A. Member Development Panel

1. Amalgamation of Public Protection and Licensing: No comments as a Member stated that this could not be done.
2. Audit and Risk and Standards Merger: Could not see any relevance in merging
3. Merging Active and Cohesive and Health: Would this make meetings too lengthy?
4. Staffing Committee: Rather than losing the Committee could it not be ad hoc?
5. Joint Parking has now gone
6. Conservation needs to stay. Officer support i.e. Conservation officer knowledge is invaluable.
7. Members Info Bulletin: Agreed this was a good idea that could be part of the Members Web page.
8. Report formats. Needs addressing, less lengthy with links to relevant areas.
9. Did not feel that the demands on their time were excessive.
10. Meetings should remain at 7pm.
11. Frequency of elections: Good as a cost saving but should there be an entirely new council there could be a risk of a loss of expertise
12. Reduction of the number of Councillors: Good as a cost savings but would recommend no less than two members per ward
13. Delegating more to officers: Councillors are taking on the responsibility of decision making and any bad decisions made would reflect on Members
14. Member Development Panel: This should remain but instead of six set meetings per year, just have three set around election time and the rest be on an ad hoc basis.

B. Comments from the Cleaner Greener Scrutiny Committee

1. Timing of Meetings

Members felt that, as a lot of Members worked, the 7pm start of meetings should remain. There was understanding that Licensing Hearings should remain in the mornings as licensees need to be at their Public House in an afternoon/evening.

2. Merging of Licensing and Public Protection

Mixed views. The two committees deal with separate issues but, the main business of licensing only lasts thirty minutes so it shouldn't be a problem to merge these two.

3. Staffing

This is an important committee and therefore should remain.

4. CAWP

One Member felt that this was important to retain the heritage of the Borough and therefore should be kept.

5. Attendance at meetings

Members felt that it was not a strain on their time to attend the meetings they represent. They are on committees that they have an 'interest' in the subject so it helps to keep them knowledgeable and gives a greater interest in those areas..

6. Extensive Structures

One Member stated that sometimes delegations were required and it also makes the process more democratic.

7. & S Standing Committees and Task and Finish

It depends on what is to be scrutinised. Although the Task and Finish Groups are important as they give an actual end date to a project. No actual clear answer was given as to whether Standing Committees were required but there was a lot of importance placed upon T&F.

8. Health and Wellbeing and Active and Cohesive

These two committees should be merged.

9. Members Bulletin

Agreed that this would be useful..

10. Frequency of Elections

Agreed that going to all out elections would be an effective way to save the Council money and would save officer and Member time.

Has the possibility of electing by halves rather than by thirds been investigated?

11. Reducing Councillors

Members agreed that this would be a cost saving to the authority but the boundaries would need to be closely looked at.

12. Member Development

No overall view but one Member stressed the importance of the 'Member-led' approach.

13. Reports

No views

14. Current Structure

No views

15. Good recommendations in principal. Could the changes ie to committees be trialled for one municipal year to assess the effectiveness?

C. Comments from Active and Cohesive Scrutiny Committee comments:

1. Amalgamation of Public Protection and Licencing.

This cannot be done. Technically it would have to be two separate meetings on the same night so not feasible.

2. Amalgamation of Standards and Audit and Risk

This is an understandable move as Standards rarely meets,

3. Amalgamation of Active and Cohesive and Health and Wellbeing

This could create long meetings. Health Scrutiny can be an intensive meeting and may result in extra meetings to complete unfinished business, thus defeating the object. Further, Active and Cohesive could suffer if concentration was placed on Health Scrutiny. Prefer to stay as they are.

4. Review the need for the Staffing Committee

No comments on this

5. Joint Parking Conservation

No comments on this

6. Reintroduce a Members Bulletin

This would be useful and could be part of the Members Web page

7. Demands on Members Time

This is not excessive. That is what they are elected for

8. 7pm start for Meetings

Happy for this to stay as it is. Especially for the Members who work.

9. Frequency of Elections

No real comments although, should a totally new Council be elected (on all outs) a lot of experience could be lost in one go.

10. Reducing the number of Councillors

This needs a bigger debate

11. Report formats and Size

Some can be lengthy and need shortening

12. Delegating more decisions to officers

This would have to be dependent upon the decision

13. Disbanding of Member Development Panel

Not a good idea. It is crucial for member-led practices and Member Development.

General Comment: Courier service was stopped too soon. It should have continued until every Member had an Ipad.

D. Comments from Economic Development Scrutiny Committee

1. Information items to be received electronically and not presented to Committee for discussion.
2. More notice of proposed developments prior to being submitted to Committee.
3. The start times of meetings to be more flexible and to look at consolidating meetings to the day.

E. Comments from the Licensing Committee and the Public Protection Committee

That the Public Protection Committee and the Licensing Committee should not be merged nor should meetings of the Committees run one after the other.

The Committees considered advice provided by James Button which stated that the correct approach was to have 2 licensing committees and that using one committee for both was not lawful (a copy of this guidance is attached).

Members considered that having one committee constituted of the same members would put significant pressure on those members to receive training and to be sufficiently competent in dealing with the various pieces of legislation covering the different committees. Having both meetings at the same time would also put additional pressure on officers to prepare reports.

Both Committees deal with important issues that affect peoples' livelihoods and the safety of the residents of the Borough, to have one meeting after the other on the same day could lead to errors in judgement and very lengthy meetings.

F. Comments from the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

1. Merge the Active and Cohesive Communities and Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committees

There was unanimous opposition to this recommendation stating that, if implemented, it would adversely affect this committee's ability to deliver effective and robust scrutiny of health related issues. In addition it was considered whilst the use of Task and Finish Groups was a valuable tool in the scrutiny process and should be continued they needed to be more streamlined and time limited.

In addition the committee supported the suggestion that the Council's Constitution Working Group should be requested to review and make recommendations to change this Committee's terms of reference to ensure that the lessons learned from the issues at Stafford Hospital and from the resultant Francis Report are embedded into this Council's arrangements.

2. Timing of Meetings

The committee supported the current practice of the majority of the Council's meetings starting at 7pm.

Members did not feel that evening meetings placed excessive demands upon their time but considered that the Constitution Working Group should look at ways in which meetings could be better managed particularly in respect of those meetings where members of the public, Consultees and others were in attendance.

3. Re-introduction of Members Information Bulletin

The committee supported this recommendation suggesting that it be incorporated into the Members website when it was up and running.

An alternative to this was that Members only receive information about matters affecting their own and adjoining Wards.

4. Reduce Frequency of Local Elections
5. Reduce the Number of Councillors
6. Delegating More Decisions to the Cabinet and Officers.

Although the committee acknowledged the importance of the above issues they considered it premature to comment at this time assuming that all councillors would have the opportunity to debate them at a later date.

G. Audit and Risk Committee

Members agreed in principle with the merging of the Audit and Risk Committee and the Standards Committee.