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# **Democratic Structure Working Group**

## **Report of the Working Group**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Democratic Structure Working Group met on Tuesday, 6th July 2010 to consider the membership of Employment Panel, a matter which had been deferred by the Council when considering the Working Group's initial proposals relating to the democratic structure review. The Working Group also considered a proposal to introduce the title of Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen to past Members of the Council and Honorary Freemen and Freewomen to local citizens.
- 1.2 Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, K J Churchill (Chairman), S J Criswell, G S E Thorpe and R G Tuplin were present at the meeting.

### **2. EMPLOYMENT PANEL AND EMPLOYEE LIAISON ADVISORY GROUP (ELAG)**

- 2.1 In considering the membership of the Employment Panel, the Working Group was reminded that as the terms and conditions of employees and other employee related issues were defined as not being an executive function of the Council, the only means of addressing such matters was either in full Council or by delegating the function to a committee or an Officer. At present, the Employment Panel comprised 8 Members, whom one was a Cabinet Member and was politically proportionate.
- 2.2 In recognising the need for there to be an appropriate forum in which to deal with employment issues, the Working Group concurred with its original suggestion that the present arrangements were working satisfactorily and that any alternative approaches would not be suitable, given that it would be inappropriate for staffing matters to be discussed at full Council meetings or for issues such as the negotiation of an annual salary award to be delegated to Officers. It was therefore proposed that no change should be made to the terms of reference, composition, etc of the Employment Panel.
- 2.3 In noting reservations had been made by the Employment Panel in recent months with regard to the scheduling and membership of ELAG, the Working Group acknowledged that the present arrangements were cumbersome and offered little opportunity for constructive dialogue between Members and employees in advance of Employment Panel meetings.

- 2.4 Having been acquainted with revised terms of reference for ELAG which had been approved at its May 2010 meeting, Members were advised that the Group had increased the employee side representation from 8 to a maximum of 15. Additionally, Members were advised of a recent decision to increase representation on the Group from 4 to 8 Members as it had been felt at the time that it was inappropriate for only half of the membership of the Panel to attend ELAG. However, it was reported that since the new arrangements came into effect, this has further added to the duplication of business being discussed at meetings.
- 2.5 In discussing a way forward, Members suggested that in terms of the membership of ELAG, 4 Members was regarded as being sufficient, irrespective of the number of employee side representatives. With regard to the scheduling of meetings, Members concurred with a suggestion that ELAG meetings should be held approximately 4 weeks before the Employment Panel which would enable issues to be discussed in advance of Panel meetings and allow employees a better opportunity to contribute towards the formulation of any employment related reports.
- 2.6 **The Working Group therefore recommends that no change be made to the terms of reference, composition, etc of the Employment Panel and that with effect from 1st December 2010 the Employee Liaison Advisory Group comprises 4 Members of the Employment Panel, with meetings of ELAG being held approximately 4 weeks before meetings of the Employment Panel.**

### **3. HONORARY ALDERMEN AND ALDERWOMEN & HONORARY FREEMEN AND FREEWOMEN**

- 3.1 Following recent changes introduced by The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the Working Group considered the introduction of the title Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen to past Members of the Council and Honorary Freemen and Freewomen to local citizens. Although the ability to confer the title of Honorary Alderman has existed for some time, the recent change reflects a recommendation by the Councillors Commission to limit the length of service of Councillors and Leaders/Mayors, thereby encouraging new persons to stand for election. One of a range of options to make it easier for Councillors to stand down was a public recognition of past service. Although the recommendation regarding a maximum length of service was not pursued by the previous Government, the promotion of a public recognition of past service was followed up in a subsequent White Paper.
- 3.2 The title of Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen can be conferred on persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Council as past Members of the authority. It can only be conferred after a person has left the Council. If that person subsequently is re-elected to the Council, he or she is no longer

entitled to be addressed as an Alderman or Alderwoman, nor can they take part in any civic ceremonies in that capacity.

- 3.3 An Honorary Alderman or Alderwoman can attend and take part in such civic ceremonies as the Council may from time to time decide but does not have the right to attend meetings of the Council, other than as a member of the public, nor to receive any financial allowances.
- 3.4 The conferment of the title would be a very public way of recognising the contribution of a former Member to public life. This could be for long service (service with pre-reorganisation authorities before 1974 also would apply), for leadership or chairmanship or for any significant act on behalf of the Council. The honorary title grants no specific rights to an individual, other than to be able to use the title and to attend civic ceremonies by invitation of the Council. The latter are limited in number in Huntingdonshire, but could include the Chairman's Ball, Reception, Civic Carol Service, etc. to which former Chairmen are usually invited at the moment.
- 3.5 The Working Group has expressed its support for the proposal and suggests that the titles of Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen be introduced by the Council. In discussing the criteria to be established to assess the qualifying length of service, the Working Group felt that four terms of office might be appropriate which would equate to a period of say 15 years to allow for by-elections. The Working Group recognised that the honour should be used sparingly. In the context of the Council's current membership, only 3 Councillors currently have attained this length of service, with a further 2 having achieved 14 years.
- 3.6 The option of offering recognition for length of service for chairmanship and leadership has also been discussed but the Working Group felt that such criteria should not be set to avoid any complexity with the scheme. This would not preclude the Council from honouring a retired Member in exceptional circumstances on an ad hoc basis where this was considered appropriate.
- 3.7 The Working Group has also considered whether the titles should be awarded to Councillors who have already left the authority. On balance, the Working Group decided against retrospective awards, having been informed that 5 former Members had in excess of 20 years service each with probably more being eligible if the term was set at 15 years.
- 3.8 **The Working Group therefore recommends that the titles of Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwoman be introduced for current and future Members of the Council who cumulatively have served a minimum of 15 years as an elected Councillor on the District Council.**
- 3.9 With regard to the idea of Honorary Freemen and Freewomen, the Council could confer the honours on such persons of distinction who

have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent public service in Huntingdonshire. The criteria for admission would need to be reasonably objective, although clearly some subjectivity would be involved in assessing the eligibility of the person or service. Such titles are distinct from the hereditary rights of other freemen and freewomen that derive from a charter and can be passed on to dependents, such as the Huntingdon Freemen. As with Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen, the same principles apply in that there is no right for Honorary Freemen and Freewomen to attend meetings of the Council or receive any financial allowances. **In the absence of any formal recognition currently for the Council to demonstrate its appreciation publicly to persons who have contributed to public life or the community in Huntingdonshire, the Working Group therefore recommends the introduction of Honorary Freeman and Honorary Freewoman titles.**

- 3.10 A resolution to confer the title of Honorary Alderman and Alderwoman and Honorary Freeman and Freewoman must be passed by not less than two-thirds of the Members voting at a special meeting of the Council specifically convened for that purpose. This must be the only item on the agenda but such a meeting could be convened either immediately before or after another scheduled Council meeting. To enable this to happen effectively, it is suggested that a cross party group or the leaders of the political parties would need to agree informally the identification of suitable individuals to ensure the necessary two-thirds majority at the specially convened meeting of the Council. **The Working Group suggests that the Council Programme meeting, which was introduced as part of the Working's Group's initial proposals for the democratic structure review and comprises representatives of all political parties, would currently serve this purpose and therefore recommends accordingly.**
- 3.11 The legislation makes provision for the Council to spend such reasonable sum as it thinks fit for the purpose of presenting an address or a casket containing an address to a person on whom a title is conferred. The Working Group has discussed the form of memento to be awarded to qualifying individuals. Formal addresses and caskets produced by companies supplying civic regalia are expensive, but the Working Group are conscious of the need to avoid what could be conceived as excessive expenditure in the current financial climate. Although such awards would not occur frequently if the system is introduced and would need to be measured against the contribution to public life that past Members and individuals have made to the authority and the District, **the Working Group recommends that a more modest address or memento should be awarded which can be produced in house by the authority.**

#### **4. REVIEW OF DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE - IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 The Working Group is currently in the process of reviewing the changes to the democratic structure since its implementation in May 2009. Members' views on the changes have already been sought via

an electronic survey conducted over the August period. The Working Group has met on two occasions in September to consider the feedback received, the findings of which will be submitted to the Council's October meeting.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 At the request of the Council, the Working Group has undertaken a review of the membership of the Employment Panel, whilst also taking into account the present arrangements in respect of Panel Members meeting with Employee Side representatives. Whilst the Working Group has expressed their satisfaction with the membership of the Employment Panel, Members have expressed their opinion that some changes would be required in respect of the membership and scheduling of ELAG meetings.
- 5.2 Additionally, the Working Group proposes the introduction of honorary titles which would create a very public recognition of the contribution that recipients have played in public service in Huntingdonshire whilst also helping to promote the profile of the District.

The Working Group therefore

### **RECOMMENDS**


- (a) that no change be made be made to the terms of reference, composition, etc of the Employment Panel;**
- (b) that with effect from 1st December 2010, the Employee Liaison Advisory Group comprises 4 Members of the Employment Panel, with meetings of ELAG being held approximately 4 weeks before meetings of the Employment Panel;**
- (c) that the titles of Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen be introduced for current and future Members of the Council who cumulatively have served a minimum of 15 years as an elected Councillor on the District Council;**
- (d) that, in the absence of any formal recognition currently for the Council to demonstrate its appreciation publicly to persons who have contributed to public life or the community in Huntingdonshire, the titles of Honorary Freemen and Honorary Freewoman be introduced by the Council;**
- (e) that the Council Programme meeting, which was introduced as part of the Working's Group's initial proposals for the democratic structure review and comprises representatives of all political parties, be responsible for the identification of suitable**

**individuals to the honorary titles referred to in recommendations (c) and (d) above; and**

- (f) that a modest address or memento be awarded to qualifying individuals of honorary titles and produced in house by the authority.**

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Agenda and Reports of the Democratic Structure Working Group held on 6th July 2010.

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