



COMMUNITY COMMISSION 15 JANUARY 2007

Report of the Chair

Experimental adoption of portfolio working within the Commission

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That members consider the experimental adoption of portfolio working within the Commission

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 Executive arrangements were introduced by Derby City Council in December 2001. The Cabinet-side arrangements have seen cumulative changes over time. Portfolios have always been allocated to its members. The original principle was that all members were equally responsible for decisions *and* those be taken collectively taken. Now a category of non-key decisions has been created, to be taken by individual members. Consequently fewer items remain to be taken by full Cabinet and these are now decided on a majority basis. Portfolios have also been reshaped with changes of control or to reflect the wishes of the governing party/parties.
- 2.2 Over five years, the overview and scrutiny function has seen many changes of chair and vice chair plus two structural changes involving the names and portfolios of commissions. The structural changes are likely to be more frequent in future given the Annual Meeting decision that commissions mirror one or more Cabinet portfolios.
- 2.3 A constant over those five years has been that commission members collectively and equally scrutinise issues coming before a commission. This means there is an expectation that every member reads every report thoroughly and gives an even level of attention to each aspect of the scrutiny role. The sole exception has been the short-lived concept of performance eye champions. To make a contrast, even though all Cabinet members retain collective responsibility for decisions, the portfolio system means that individuals are entrusted to take a lead on issues within their responsibility and frame recommendations to their colleagues. Implicit in that is the amount and range of council business makes it impractical to expect every member to have a detailed knowledge of each issue or service area.

- 2.4 Some of our meetings have had several major issues to deal with in the one evening, I believe effective scrutiny was generally achieved but only by finishing around 9 pm. Issues that are important but not immediate can get displaced: Performance Eye rarely gets the attention it merits. Further, sometimes it is quickly apparent that we are all content about a report's contents and an officer's presence was unnecessary. I now propose that the Community Commission consider adopting a portfolio approach of working.

The Proposal

- 2.5 The purpose is to help us to use the Commission's time to best effect, so we screen out issues where we are all content with the proposed course of action and focus time on complex and controversial issues. To do so, the various elements within the Commission's overall portfolio would be allocated between willing members. The lead members would keep a watching brief on their sub-set of responsibilities:
- Carefully reading relevant reports and advising colleagues prior to Commission meetings as to the level of scrutiny it warrants
 - Checking the Forward Plan for new items and with the appropriate officer about how important and or controversial decisions are likely to be.
 - Checking the agenda of the appropriate DCP 'Cities' for relevant issues, for example, external funding.
 - Flagging up issues from newspapers, the Municipal Journal and Local Government Chronicle that may be of interest.

None of this would involve additional meetings as the main means of communicating would be by e-mail. I would envisage a standing item early on commission agendas offering the opportunity for any verbal reports members wished to give.

- 2.6 I believe three principles apply. First, that the change will not result in any member having to devote more time to the commission's work. Second, no member would be disadvantaged in the amount of information available to them – all would still receive the full information which they can choose to read. Third, there will be a time dividend for all portfolio holders but the greater the level of trust between members the greater that dividend might be. To show this, indicative allocations are set out at Appendix 2.
- 2.7 It would be an experiment and if it proves unsuccessful in practice we would abandon the model. Other commissions might wish to observe the new style of working. Although it would be an innovation for the scrutiny function it would feel familiar to those who serve as school governors where lead responsibilities are frequently allocated for areas like health and safety, special educational needs, looked after children.

- 2.8 Because this would be a significant step for us to take, I am circulating this paper now in order to give members time to digest the proposal before our meeting in January. I would only want to proceed if there was cross-party agreement in favour of the principle. I would be very willing to discuss this with any member who has suggestions or concerns.

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Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Indicative allocations

Appendix 1

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. None

Legal

- 2 None directly. The effectiveness of the scrutiny function is likely to be enhanced.

Personnel

- 3 There is likely to be a time dividend if some issues are screened out and the relevant officer's attendance is not required at meetings.

Equalities impact

- 4 None directly to staff or residents.

Corporate Priorities

- 5 The effectiveness of the scrutiny function is likely to be enhanced so should result in more value being added to Council policies, decisions and performance.

ILLUSTRATIVE ALLOCATIONS OF LEAD RESPONSIBILITY

To 5 political pairs of members

Please assume the pairs are from different parties. With 11 members one three party team is needed.

Commission Members	Portfolio Elements
Councillor A and B	Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy External Regeneration Funding New Deal for Communities
Councillor C and D	Housing Strategy and Development Private Sector Housing Housing Management – Client Housing Options and Homelessness
Councillor E and F	Area and Neighbourhood Co-ordination, including Area Panels Community Development
Councillor G and H	Customer Services Housing and Council Tax Benefits The Council's Buildings of Heritage and Importance
Councillor I, J and K	Community Legal Services Derby Advice Social Cohesion Performance Eye Monitor

To 11 individual members

Commission Member	Portfolio Elements
Councillor A	Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy External Regeneration Funding New Deal for Communities
Councillor B	Housing Strategy and Development Private Sector Housing
Councillor C	Housing Management – Client
Councillor D	Area and Neighbourhood Co-ordination, including Area Panels Community Development

Councillor E	Customer Services
Councillor F	Housing and Council Tax Benefits
Councillor G	Community Legal Services Derby Advice
Councillor H	The Council's Buildings of Heritage and Importance
Councillor I	Social Cohesion
Councillor J	Housing Options and Homelessness
Councillor K	Performance Eye Monitor