

Clerks report on City Council proposal to revise Rural Scrutiny Process

THIS PAPER IS BEING PREPARED IN ADVANCE OF RECEIPT OF A FORMAL CONSULTATION DOCUMENT FROM THE CITY COUNCIL. The city council document will doubtless contain more detailed information and will be circulated to councillors on receipt. This report is prepared on the basis of the clerk's understanding of reports to the Parish Liaison forum (PLF) and subsequently to the subsidiary PLF working group.

Background.

There are currently 5 scrutiny committees, one of which is the rural scrutiny committee (RSC). Each of these comprises 7 to 11 city councillors plus co-options. Membership of RSC includes 4 non-voting, co-opted, Parish councillors from rural parishes. Those four co-option's are nominated from the PLF.

City council view is that this is inefficient and causes delays and duplications in formulating strategic decisions and policies. Major decisions are considered by the other committees and duplicated to RSC.

The proposal is to reduce these committees from 5 to 4 and disbanding the RSC. However the intention is also to strengthen the "rural voice". This is to be achieved by each of the remaining 4 committees being able to co-opt a parish councillor, AND upgrading the status of the PLF to a mandated consultee. It has been noted that the PLF includes representation from urban parishes

Consultation process

The above proposals were outlined to the Parish Liaison forum and greeted with a great deal of scepticism. This was because they were delivered like a bolt out of the blue. Current RSC co-optees were unaware. City council senior officer was not present and acknowledges that the proposals were poorly presented.

Since the meeting of the parish liaison forum a number of points have been clarified

1. Each of the 4 main committees will comprise 11 city councillors and will be MANDATED to co-opt a minimum of one rural parish councillor representative(s).
2. Officers preparing reports will be required to complete a paragraph on impact on rural communities.
3. Parish liaison forum may have to meet more frequently and to a timetable enabling consultee views to be considered prior to reports to committees or cabinet

Conclusion

PLF working group and representatives of current co-optees still have some reservations about the proposals but, subject to the final detail of the proposals, have been greatly reassured by :

1. The assurances given so far.
2. The consultative process where all rural parishes are being given the opportunity to raise concerns to be addressed in the process of finalising details.

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