

Review of Local Committees

Chiltern Local Committee **4 April 2001**

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1 Purpose of report

- a To present results of the questionnaire to Local Committee members and stakeholders and tell the Committee about the review process.

2 Proposed action

- b **To invite the Committee to NOTE the report and MAKE FURTHER COMMENTS if they wish.**

3 Supporting information

- c The Local Committees were set up in May 2000 and a review is currently under way to assess their success. The County Council's Select Committee on the Environment will receive a report on 26 March 2001 and then make recommendations to the Cabinet and County Council about how the future of the Local Committees should develop. Proposals for the Local Committees will be included in the new Constitution which will be submitted to government at the end of April.
- d As part of the review of local committees, a questionnaire was sent to all Local Committee members and a number of other stakeholders. The replies for all committees which were received by the closing date (91) are summarised in Table 1 which also shows the questions asked. Table 3 lists the respondents. At the time of writing, some further questionnaires are still being received. Updated tables will be presented to the Committee.
- e The headline results from all responses to the survey are outlined below. Table 2 attached to this report shows the results for each Committee. The replies generally followed a similar pattern across the Committees. Where there were differences, they are mentioned below.
 - i 82% of respondents felt that 4 meetings a year was about right.
 - ii 79% feel that the tone of the meeting (degree of formality) is about right

- iii 43% of all respondents expressed a preference for early evening meetings starting at 5.00 or 6.00 pm, 29% prefer afternoon meetings. 73% of those responding from the South Bucks Committee area have expressed a preference for afternoon meetings. Some respondents made the point that people who work full time often find it difficult to attend unless meetings are in the evening.
 - iv Overall 46% of respondents felt that the length of meetings was about right, compared with 42% who think they are too long. An analysis by district shows that all districts except Wycombe feel that their meetings are too long.
 - v Roughly equal proportions of respondents felt that agendas were either too long (45%) or about right (43%).
 - vi 66% of respondents feel that the committees consider issues that are important to their organisations.
 - vii Very few organisations felt that no action was taken on issues agreed at the local committees only 4% across the county.
 - viii 58% of respondents felt that local committees should advise the County Council on the decisions it makes.
 - ix 59% of respondents feel that they should help the Council's select committees examine areas of the Council's work.
 - x 41% feel they should be expanded to include other service areas.
 - xi 95% feel local committees should be used to consult local communities about issues affecting their area and the county as a whole.
- f The questionnaire was used to revisit the 'Hopes and Fears' for the new committees which were expressed at the first round of local committee meetings in May 2000. Respondents were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with statements expressing the most frequently mentioned hopes and fears.
- i 68% agreed that the Local Committees provide a real voice for local people
 - ii 45% agreed that it has been difficult to reach agreement
 - iii 81% agreed that spending has followed local priorities
 - iv 79% agreed that the County Council has listened

- v 76% agreed that insufficient money is allocated, including 30% who strongly agreed
 - vi 69% agreed that there is better understanding between the three tiers of local government
 - vii 41% agreed that the Local Committees are just a talking shop
 - viii 55% agreed that larger councils dominate the meetings
- g Over half of all respondents added extra comments to their responses. The comments are summarised in Table 4.
- h 37 respondents felt the committees could be expanded to include other council services. Suggestions included public and community transport, social services and school transport, structure planning and other environmental issues, social services, education. However, three respondents said the agenda should be restricted to environmental issues or should not include social services or education. A full list of the responses to this question is in Table 1.
- i The overall message from the responses to the questionnaire is generally positive but there remain some important issues to be addressed to ensure that the Local Committees can be even more effective.
- j The Select Committee will be making proposals to Cabinet for immediate actions to address these issues in the short and longer term. The Select Committee report will be sent to Local Committee Members as soon as it is available.