

B REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER

Cabinet Working and Public Engagement

- 1 Judging and measuring the success of our new political arrangements is unlikely to be an exact science. Our new Cabinet and Scrutiny system has replaced a system that, in the eyes of some (but not all) of the public, was seen as outdated and irrelevant to modern local government.
- 2 If we wish to be, and be seen to be, a customer focused and locally accountable body that acts as a community leader and is of real benefit to the people of Buckinghamshire, then we need to demonstrate that through all of our behaviours and contacts with residents, partners and national organisations. One major tool available to us to set the tone and style for the Council is how we manage and run the meetings of Cabinet.
- 3 By focusing on Cabinet as the key public decision making forum for the Council and where our leadership stems from, we can better understand the importance of managing it not as a meeting of senior members but as a key influence on the Council's public reputation.
- 4 Cabinet members have therefore agreed a set of actions that are designed to:
 - allow Cabinet to operate and be clearly seen as the open, accountable and local face of the County Council and that which provides leadership for Buckinghamshire not only in our services but in all aspects of County life
 - develop awareness of Cabinet and its role
 - encourage public interest and involvement in Cabinet meetings on a regular basis
 - demonstrate the openness and accountability of local government
 - celebrate the Cabinet system as being at the heart of local democracy and deserving of community support.

- 5 The agreed proposals that I believe are an important first step on this road are:
 - An absolute requirement that all reports to Cabinet are written in clear English and can be easily understood by all people (reports not meeting these criteria should be returned for re-writing). Reports should be no more than two pages long with appendices, if necessary, again no more than two pages in length
 - For Cabinet and Cabinet Member Key Decisions a revised format which encourages report authors to deal (concisely) with all relevant matters and in particular to explain options and give reasons
 - Active agenda management to ensure that our meetings are focused on key decisions that will impact on the County and its people, and are not too long
 - Plain English decision sheets
 - Portfolio round up at the start of our meetings, with bullet-point roundup summaries produced by each Cabinet Member
 - An advert to be published in the two main papers one week before each Cabinet setting out the key decisions that will be taken plus similar on local radio
 - Cabinet meetings to be held at venues away from Aylesbury at least four times a year with wide publicity to encourage public attendance
 - A high profile Cabinet web presence with names, contact information, responsibilities and summaries of all major decisions taken or to be taken.

Best Value Inspection

- 6 We have received our first visit from the Best Value Inspectorate, who have looked at the Trading Standards Service in the light of our own Best Value Review. It may be some time before their report is finished, but in the meantime it is worth reflecting briefly on the process of being inspected, because there are some points that are relevant to all our reviews.

- 7 First, it was clear that the inspectors came to evaluate the service, not just to comment on our own review. They focused their efforts towards arriving at two main judgements: how good is the service, and is it likely to improve? They concentrated heavily on comparative performance data, and of the views of users which they assessed through focus groups. They also conducted some anonymous “reality checks” to see if service practice reflected stated intentions.
- 8 Secondly, their approach strongly reflected the challenge aspect of Best Value, and I know it was not a comfortable experience for those involved – even though we hope the service will have come through the exercise with the strengths identified in our own review confirmed. However the lessons of this experience need to be heeded by those completing or conducting other reviews which will in turn be scrutinised by the Inspectorate.

BILL CHAPPLE
DEPUTY LEADER