

Report to Chesham Local Area Forum

Title: Formal Membership and Voting Arrangements

To: Chesham Local Area Forum

Date: 2 December 2009

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Recommendation

1. Chesham Local Area Forum is invited **to discuss** and **to agree** its formal membership and voting arrangements

Introduction

2. The overriding principle is that wherever possible, decision-making at LAFs should be by common agreement.
3. In practice, the more established LAFs rarely vote. When voting takes place, it is usually a straw poll to test out opinion at a large meeting where not everyone can speak rather than being a formal vote.
4. If the LAF insists on formal voting, the following are options that are used in different LAFs across the County, that Chesham LAF members can take into consideration when reaching a decision on its own arrangements.



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Options

5. “Model” constitution

A vote for each formal member of the LAF i.e.:

- All County and District Councillors for the Local Community Area.
- One representative per parish. (Typically the parish rep will be a parish councillor)

Plus

- Anyone one else that the LAF chooses to invite into membership e.g. community or residents groups. The Council’s policy (Full Council July 2008) is to encourage LAFs to engage as widely as possible although membership by any such groups is at the LAF's discretion.

In Chesham that would mean:

- 4 County Councillors
- 12 District Councillors (2 vote as County Cllrs) – it is unlikely all would attend, but possible.
- 1 vote per parish/town Council i.e. 6 votes

So if all attended from this list above, this would mean a maximum of 22 votes.

Additional organisations e.g. TVP and ChAP could be invited as non voting participants or as voting members. No LAFs presently have voting members outside of County, District and Parish councils, although outside organisations are represented.

Buckingham; Haddenham and Long Crendon; High Wycombe, Wendover and Winslow LAFs all work on the basis of one vote per parish or town council.

6. “Weighted voting” approach - *this was proposed at the first meeting of the LAF on 16 Sept 16th by Chris Howell (Chartridge PC). It acknowledges the population size of Chesham town whilst ensuring that the parishes will not be overwhelmed at the LAF by the town council presence.*

- 5 votes to rural parishes (i.e. one vote each)
- 5 votes to be allocated to Chesham Town – to be distributed by the CTC e.g. shared with the ChAP
- 4 County Councillors
- 12 District Councils (but 2 vote as County Cllrs) – it is unlikely that all would attend but possible.

So if all attended from this list above, this would mean a maximum of 24 votes.

Plus

SW Chilterns, Princes Risborough, Chepping Wye, Greater Aylesbury and Gt Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe LAFs use versions of this approach – i.e. the number of votes per parish/town council determined by the relative population sizes of the parishes.

7. “Amersham” model

One vote per organisation rather than one vote per County/District councillor.

- 1 vote per parish
- 1 vote for Town Council
- 1 vote for District Council - be “shared” by the 12 District Councillors. The voting Member to be nominated by the Leader of Chiltern District Council
- 1 vote for BCC - to be “shared” by the 4 County Councillors. The Chairman will not be the usual voting member since the Chairman will have a casting vote in case of deadlock
- If all votes were cast this would mean a maximum of 8 votes, plus a possible 9th if the Chairman used a casting vote

8. Other comments

- With regard to County and District councillors, a twin or triple hatter only gets one vote, therefore a parish might choose to appoint someone other than a district/county councillor as their representative.
- Where a councillor is both a County and District councillor, it is expected they will exercise the vote as a County Councillor. Likewise, a district councillor who is a district and parish councillor is expected to exercise the vote as a District Councillor.
- With respect to County Council decisions, the LAF decision is advisory with the final decision resting with the appropriate Head of Service. A Head of Service decision not to follow the LAF’s advice would require a report back to the LAF/LCP.
- To avoid any confusion if a formal vote is ever be required, it will be important that each voting organisation nominates a named person(s) and substitute(s) who can cast their vote.

9. Views expressed so far on these options

Discussions between Kerry Stevens and parish council representatives from Ashley Green, Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards, Chartridge and Latimer on 13 October 2009 indicated overwhelming support for a system where the same number of votes is allocated to each 3rd tier authority – i.e. one vote to be allocated to each Parish and one to Chesham Town Council.

Other comments included:

- Collective issues should be addressed by the Forum, rather than parochial issues.
- Some Members did not envisage a vote ever taking place
- If each Parish/Town Council supplies only one representative, each would have more ‘air time’ at the meeting maximising the change for good discussion.
- A formula idea for voting was not the right way to address the issue.
- Party politics should not be brought into the Forum. Parish Councils were apolitical.
- Chesham Town Council should not have 5 votes (3 votes etc. could be debated, but should be avoided).

Comments sought from Chesham Town Council at the Council meeting on 16 November resulted in the suggestion of Chesham Town having 3 votes and the rural parishes having

one each, but the Town or any parish being at liberty to let a voluntary body such as ChAP to use this vote, if they so wished.

- 10.** In the absence of an agreed resolution regarding the voting protocol, decisions can only be made by common agreement. In the absence of common agreement, decisions will be made by the Chairman and Vice Chairman, acting in the best interests of the local area

- Report ends -
