

Peterborough City Council Group Leaders' Meeting

7 August 2013, 5.30pm

Town Hall, Peterborough

Attendees – Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Sir Tony Redmond – Lead Commissioner

Tim Bowden – Review Manager

Attendees – Peterborough City Council

Councillor Cereste – Leader of the Council/Leader of the Conservative Group

Councillor Khan – Leader of the Labour Group.

Councillor Harrington – Leader of the Peterborough Independent Forum

Councillor Sandford – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.

Gillian Beasley – Chief Executive

Diane Baker – Head of Governance

Sir Tony opened the meeting outlining that the Council had put together a thorough document covering the proposed council size of 60 and wanted to delve deeper into how the council size of 60 was constructed. Sir Tony outlined that the Commission would not consider increases in electorate as a reason for an increase in council size.

Councillor Cereste, said that if you put the growth of the City to one-side, that the nature of the City has completely changed over the years. He highlighted the diverse nature of the City and how this creates new challenges. An example Councillor Cereste used was how HMOs had brought new challenges to the workload for councillors. Councillor Cereste considered that local councillors are a port of call for members of the public, particularly those new to the City.

Councillor Khan echoed the comments of Councillor Cereste. Councillor Khan considered that the role of elected member was almost a full-time job. He also highlighted that the diverse nature of the City brought challenges, particularly language issues. He considered that the cabinet structure impacted on the workload of members as other ward councillors would cover the ward work of cabinet members. Councillor Khan favoured the reintroduction of neighbourhood committees, which he considered would further increase councillor workload.

Councillor Harrington stated that his ward included a number of parishes. He indicated that all the parishes had different issues, impacted on his time in different ways and that part of his job was bringing all these different views together.

Councillor Sandford considered that the workload of members across the City varied a lot. He considered that workload of members had increased as members played a key role in the delivery of services via partnerships, trusts and private companies. Councillor Sandford also favoured a change in

executive functions and supported the passing of more powers to local councillors.

Councillor Cereste indicated that neighbourhood committees could well be reintroduced. He also stated that the Council welcomed parts of the authority wanting to become parish councils. Councillor Cereste said that at least two areas of the City were considering establishing parish councils.

Having listened to the arguments Sir Tony asked what process was undertaken in arriving at a council size of 60.

Councillor Cereste said that the working group had gone through a process of considering the different evidence presented to the group which in turn had built up a case for 60 councillors. Later in the meeting Councillor Cereste indicated that the working group had firstly considered a council size of 30 councillors. However, as evidence was provided regarding the role and workload of members they soon established that a council size of this size was not manageable. He considered that a council size of 60 was manageable and that anymore would not be affordable or necessarily in the interests of the public purse. He also indicated that the working group had considered a larger increase in council size to 72 members but considered this would not be in the public's interest.

Councillor Khan said that the working group was also concerned that too much power would be centred in the executive under a council size of 30.

Councillor Sandford considered that a small increase in council size could be justified when taking into account the significant developments across the City, particularly the Great Haddon development, and the different challenges faced by members.

Sir Tony asked whether the Council had reviewed its list of outside bodies. Councillor Cereste explained that the list had been reviewed recently.

Sir Tony asked how delegation works at the authority. Councillor Cereste said that the Council had a scheme of delegation which had been reviewed by the constitutional group. He considered that the scheme of delegation the authority had worked and was about making more decisions and getting them through the authority as quickly as reasonably as possible.

Sir Tony asked whether technology has had an impact on member workload.

Councillor Khan considered that the use of technology had assisted members in completing work.

Councillor Harrington indicated that the use of technology had been useful with a drawback being its impact on building working relationships with officers.

Councillor Sandford considered that technology was useful and had increased member workload as it was now easier for constituents to contact councillors. This view was shared by all councillors present.

Sir Tony asked what support was provided for members by officers.

Councillor Khan indicated that member support has decreased but also recognised that it was now provided in different forms. For example he considered that he would now contact officers directly who were responsible for specific areas.

Sir Tony asked how Localism was provided in Peterborough

Councillor Cereste highlighted the funding for parishes in Peterborough is via precept money and some funding from the Council. He reiterated his earlier comments of supporting the creation of parishes in the City and welcomed the devolution of powers to them if this was something parish councils wanted.

Councillor Harrington indicated that he would attend parish council meetings every month and considered that the ward councillor was a vehicle to make the points raised back to the authority.

Following questions on council size Sir Tony and Tim Bowden answered questions on elections by thirds, general points on council size and the timetable for the next stage in the process.

Sir Tony thanked everyone for attending the meeting and welcomed the valuable input.

Meeting closed at 6.45pm.