

Minutes of the Special meeting held at Ingleborough Community Centre, Ingleton on Tuesday, 31 July 2007.

Present:

R Alderson, RA Bird, J Blackie, Mrs A Brooks, WH Brown, SHK Butcher, G Dalton, W Fenten,
C Hammond, TRN Harrison-Topham, D Heather, KJ Lancaster, C Lis (in the Chair), SR Macaré, Mrs S Marshall, Mrs D Millward, A Osborne, Mrs Y Peacock, Dr KM Petyt, Ms N Stedman and
W Weston.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

68/07 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS AND SIZE OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

CONSIDERED –

- (a) a report from the Chief Executive that provided background on the Authority decision to establish a Planning Committee of 11 members, and that reminded members of the provisions within Standing Orders that allowed the reconsideration of that earlier decision at a Special meeting of the Authority; and
- (b) a Discussion Paper, produced by the six signatories to the requisition for the Special meeting, that set out their reasons for proposing that the Planning Committee should comprise 15 members.

Members, in initially debating whether or not Standing Orders should be suspended to then allow the size of the Planning Committee to be considered, raised a number of points, including:

- this was an exceptional case, of great importance to the local community;
- when the Authority had taken the decision in May to reduce the size of the Committee, the Authority had not been at 'full strength', as there was a vacancy amongst the Parish membership. Today's meeting was the first occasion on which all members were available to attend an Authority meeting;
- the last meeting had been attended by 19 of the available 21 members and there had been a full debate of the issues involved. There had been no suggestion that the debate should not be held due to lack of representation;
- the 'importance to the local community' did not seem to be reflected in the importance with which Richmondshire Parish Councils viewed the election for their nominee on the Authority, as only 10 of 25 parishes had voted in the recent election;

- members should accept 'corporate responsibility' on decisions. Not all decisions were fully supported by all members, but to call Special meetings would soon bring the work of the Authority to a standstill. The decision to reduce the size of the Committee had been democratically taken by 19 members;
- the mechanism for the suspension of standing orders existed and was being properly exercised;
- making a comparison with company law, where to suspend standing orders would require a special resolution. Such a resolution would require a 75% majority, whereas the Authority's Standing Orders did not have any such requirement;
- suggesting that a special meeting was only warranted if an overwhelmingly wrong decision had been taken previously or that the decision had resulted in some injustice, neither of which was believed to be the case in this instance.

RESOLVED –

That Standing Orders be suspended to allow a debate on a decision taken within the last six months and to consider the proposal that the size of the Planning Committee should be 15 members.



In debating the proposal, which was moved and seconded as recorded in Paragraph 2 of the Agenda, that (in summary) the size of the Planning Committee should be 15, members raised a number of issues, including:

- pointing out that the public's perception was that Planning was the most important aspect of the Authority's work. Having gained Parish representation on the Authority at independence, reducing the committee to 11 members would exclude half of that representation from the committee;
- reminding members that when the Planning Committee had been reduced to 15, there had been fears that the Committee's independence would be lost. Those fears had proved to be unfounded;
- whilst emphasising the importance of the Member Champion (MC) initiative, it had not resulted in any sidelining of MCs from the planning decision-making process. All members could attend and speak at any meeting;
- suggesting that the mistake was in reducing, unnecessarily, the Authority membership from 26 to 22;
- expressing disappointment at the lack of attendance at Planning Committee site visits;
- commenting that the 'reduced' Committee had operated as had the previous full Authority-sized Committee. How did District Councils' Planning Committees address the representational role that the signatories believed to be important?
- a membership of 11 would free up time for other members to work as MCs;
- even a Committee of 22 would have geographical 'gaps' as regards representation;
- the inference that Secretary of State appointees put national interests above those of locals was incorrect – they may have a different perspective but were not under any electoral pressure, so could maintain a degree of objectivity.

An amendment was then moved and seconded to add the following words after “That” –
“subject to the principle being adopted that Member Champions may be members of the Planning Committee and vice versa and that non-members of the Planning Committee have first call rights on Member Champion positions..”

The mover and seconder of the original motion agreed to the inclusion of the proposed amendment in the motion.

In debating the proposal, members raised further issues, including:

- commenting that the role of Member Champion was being significantly devalued to the position that “if a member is left over they can be a Member Champion”;
- suggesting that the reference to geographical representation was a false understanding of the role of members;
- claiming that the ‘use of talents’ mentioned in the Discussion Paper was misleading as, during the committee nomination process, a member had been ousted from certain committees against his wishes;
- questioning the public perception of Planning Committee decision-making and the regularity with which local plan policies were set aside;
- pointing out that the local authority appointees, particularly those from District Councils, saw themselves having the role of community leaders and the fear that a committee of eleven members could be established without any representation from a particular part of the Park;
- emphasising that the commitment to the role of Member Champions was considerable and one of the reasons for reducing the Planning Committee size was to free-up member time to undertake that role;
- disagreeing with the view that the Planning Committee was ‘just another Committee’ and referring to the Chief Executive’s conclusion in his May 2007 Authority report that the “Planning Committee is a special case”;
- pointing out that parish members in obtaining their nominations to the Authority were selected on a geographical basis and suggesting that all four parish members should be on the Committee.

The Chief Executive pointed out that the Special meeting had been called to debate a very precise allocation of membership. He added that proportionality would require that the allocation of seats for Parish members would be two, whether a Planning Committee consisted of 11, 12, 13 or 14 members.

Further comments were made from members including:

- suggesting that a Planning Committee of 11 members would be more objective and more efficient;
- the original decision to reduce the size of the Committee from 26 to 15 members had been intended to be reviewed in two years – this should not have been changed;
- pointing out that it had taken 40 years for Parish Councils to achieve representation on National Parks, and to see their representation on the Planning Committee reduced to two was unacceptable

- referring members to the peer assessment report that had stated that the Authority placed too much emphasis on planning;
- reminding the meeting that any member of the Authority had the right to speak at any meeting and therefore could still attend and speak on any planning application, and that District Council Planning Committees invariably operated without full geographical representation;
- concluding that the decision to reduce the size of the Committee had been taken at the wrong time when there were vacancies on the Authority; that the current committee of 15 members had operated successfully, addressing successfully the situation of the Authority having been designated as a Standards Authority; and suggesting that with the ability of members both to serve on the Committee and be Member Champions, the fear that there would be insufficient Champions would not materialise.

RESOLVED –

That, subject to the principle being adopted that Member Champions may be members of the Planning Committee and vice versa and that non-members of the Planning Committee have 'first call rights' on Member Champion positions, the size of the Planning Committee should be fifteen members of the Authority, consisting of four members appointed by the County Councils; four members appointed by the District Councils; four members appointed by the Secretary of State to represent the national interest; and three members appointed by the Secretary of State as Parish members; and that this decision take immediate effect, the membership of the Planning Committee to be determined by the Authority under the established procedures at its meeting on 31 July 2007, and thereafter at each annual meeting of the Authority.