

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Special Council Meeting 10th August, 2006

Report of Head of Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the options for the Special Council meeting taking place in the autumn.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Council consider the proposed issues for discussion at the Special Council Meeting and agree a topic and format for the meeting.**
- (2) That a date, time and venue be set for the Special Council Meeting in 2006/07.**

1.0 Report

1.1 At its meeting on 15th March, 2006 Council resolved :

“That one of the existing autumn meetings of Council, shall be selected by the Council Business Committee and re-designated as a ‘Special’ Council meeting for any of the following purposes :

- Consideration of a single topic
- Hearing of an external speaker
- Meeting in assembly or forum
- Consideration of a local, regional or national issue
- Or other purpose to be determined by the Council Business Committee

1.2 The Chairman of the Council Business Committee requested that all Councillors were consulted to hear their suggestions as to what could be considered at this Special meeting.

2.0 Proposal Details

2.1 There are 2 potential dates in the Council timetable for 2006/07 which could be described as ‘Autumn’ – 27th September and 1st November.

2.2 All Members have been invited to put forward suggestions for issues to be considered at this Special Council meeting and the following have been received :-

- Local Government Bill – Double Devolution and Neighbourhood (including issues such as Morecambe Town Council and Parishing).
- Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreements.
- Diversity within Lancaster District- how are we doing in regard to service provision and how can we improve?
- Health and Well Being in our Community are our services delivering in accordance with health and beauty surrounds.
- How are we going to adapt our services and enhance our service provision for an increasing ageing population within our District.
- Litter – an Effective Strategy
- Recycling of Plastic
- Climate Change

2.3 The Committee is also requested to consider the format of this meeting. There are three styles of meetings set out below :

- (i) *A state of the district debate* – involving Councillors and also the public, other stakeholders and the media. This Council did hold such a debate in 2002 but in the first review of the Constitution it was not felt that it had been a success and it was dispensed with. Several other Councils who had done the same are now having second thoughts and experimenting with different formats. It can take the form of the Leader reporting on what has happened and what is about to happen, stimulating debate on a particular facet of the District, or it can be an integral part of the community planning process, inviting members of the public to join in debates on a series of topics on which representatives of outside organisations could be asked to make an introductory presentation, e.g. on local transport or health issues. This could also be combined with a session where the public can raise questions on other topics. Alternatively the event could be used to stage a “visioning”, “blue sky thinking” community forum style debate on what the area should be like in 5 or 10 years time. This would entail an open debate, without an agenda, allowing general consultation and engagement, with no decision at the end but a series of views which could inform future decisions.
- (ii) *Outside Speakers* – These can range from inviting speakers such as the Police, Health Board, PCT, a large private sector company such as BNFL, etc to give a presentation and answer questions or they can be invited to take part in a session of debate and exchange of views. They can be purely fact-finding missions or outside organisations can be invited to explore issues with the Council. Local MPs could be invited to share with the Council their views on local issues.
- (iii) *Single Issue meetings* - Council can be used as a forum for debate and deliberation on single issues – community safety, environmental sustainability, economic development, the activities and effectiveness of other public agencies for example. This has been done in the past by means of

holding an extraordinary meeting, as was the case for example last year to debate the M6 link road issue. It can also be seen as an extension of the current provision for motions on notice to be debated but could be improved by planning further ahead and advertising the issues to be debated allowing a greater opportunity for research and fact finding prior to the debate. Such debate could as now involve only councillors or it could provide a forum for the community and other agencies to debate important local issues alongside members. They can be used to make a decision on a particularly important issue or they can be used to formulate a council view to put pressure on another body. Involving external bodies or the general public can be a useful mechanism in raising public awareness but on the other hand councillors have a legitimate role as an elected body to debate different views and speak on behalf of the community.

3.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

3.1 Date

Last year, Council only met once in the Autumn on 2nd November, 2005. This meeting did not have a considerable amount of business on the Agenda even though Council had not met since July. Therefore either 27th September or 1st November would be suitable dates for the Special Council meeting depending on the topic and format agreed.

If a single topic was agreed upon, which would not require an outside speaker to attend and the meeting could be arranged 'in house', this could be arranged in a relatively short space of time for the September meeting.

If Members decide to opt for a larger, district debate type of meeting, this would obviously take longer to organise and therefore it would ideally take place in November.

Members are requested to consider which date the Special Council meeting is to be held.

3.2 Topic

Members are requested to consider the proposed issues set out in 2.2 above for consideration at the Special Council meeting or any other issues suggested at the meeting.

3.3 Format

There are several factors that need to be taken in to account when considering the format of the Special Council meeting. In considering the formats set out above in 2.3, Members need to consider stakeholders, outside speakers and the public interest this may generate.

Members also need to consider where this Special meeting of the Council will be held. If a large number of public are expected, it may be sensible to hold the meeting at Lancaster Town Hall to accommodate the numbers. Alternatively, the meeting could be held in a community building which may encourage more members of the public to attend.

Similarly, if public involvement is a priority then it might be preferable to hold the meeting in an evening rather than at 2.00 pm.

Members are requested to consider which format would best suit the topic that has been agreed.

4 Conclusion

The views of the Mayor will be obtained prior to finalising any proposed agenda.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

No direct implications

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are unlikely to be significant financial implications as a result of this report.

A change in venue may incur hire charges and there may be costs associated with external speakers. These can however be met from existing budgets for democratic representation.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Any meeting must be held in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Constitution and Access to Information legislation.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Council Minutes

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