

Appendix C

I took the opportunity to attend the **CONSULTATION** session regarding 'interacting with the public' at the session in the Grand Jury Room on 21st Jan. Councillors will know I have attended a fair few meetings over the last ten years. I promised to submit my views and suggestions in writing, so here goes-

IS IT WORTH BOTHERING? In respect of attending to comment on contentious policy decisions at **Cabinet**, probably not. Views from the public are politely 'noted'. Cabinet members make approving remarks and each item is nodded through. In that respect, not much point except to form opinions of the policy and those rubber-stamping it.

It might be worthwhile attending if you are raising a local or personal matter under general HYS. There is then the prospect of some follow-up.

In respect of the **Scrutiny** panel, it is rare for either Portfolioholders or Officers to concede a point or accept grounds for criticism. Scrutiny from the panel is usually pretty tame. Half of the panel are unlikely to put their own party leaders on the spot. Too many comments, not enough questions. Therefore a member of the public has virtually no chance of influencing the outcome.

In respect of simply observing both those meetings, first-time attendees may well be disinclined to come again.

Apart from debating really substantive matters, **full Council** meetings are more show than substance. The high spot for an observer should be 'questions to the portfolioholders. That is if they can sit around that long.

That is where we see which ward councillors get on their feet and ask what of whom. Which questions are for self or party promotion and which really challenge? This is more important than perhaps some councillors think. In my view it is wrong that this is at the end of the agenda when everyone has lost the will to live and the public seats are empty. It should come after Mayor's announcements and before items for debate.

Motions by members or groups that comment on government policy and not in the strict remit of Colchester Council should appear last on the agenda.

TIMING AND ACCESS. First item on the agenda after an 18.00 start excludes the vast majority of working residents and/or those relying on public transport. An 18.30 start would assist and speakers should be allowed up to four minutes.

A SUGGESTION. Every 8 to 12 weeks a mini ‘**Cabinet listening**’ session be set up in an appropriate room on a Saturday morning in the T/H, or another suitable venue. Formal, minuted, recorded and chaired by The Portfolioholder for Customers. It would enhance that otherwise questionable role.

That P/H would sit with two or three other cabinet members. They should include the Leader or Deputy Leader, or Deputy to the Leader and at least one other cabinet holder. Not necessarily the same ones each time.

They would be available from 10 am to 12 noon and accept submissions and questions of up to four minutes from the public. A similar to format of existing HYS, with people registering to speak at any time up to 11.30.

This shouldn’t be too burdensome for those involved and opens up a route of engagement with those who can’t practically attend the evening meetings.

Whilst modern technology and social media has its place in the grand scheme of things, it must not replace direct engagement.

PUBLICITY. The website needs to be revised so the public can more easily drill down to consultations and meeting agendas. Each and every meeting agenda should make reference to welcoming HYS contributions and the criteria for submissions. The same should apply to printed posters listing meeting dates.

REACHING OUT. Perhaps there is a case for Cabinet members (eg Communities) to attend Parish and Town councils occasionally. Be on receive as well as transmit. It would reduce the impression that CBC is only interested in urban areas.

The results of this consultation need to be considered alongside improving outgoing press releases and P/H statements. Better information about contentious policies is needed whilst giving reassurances to those concerned. I hope CBC finds this contribution constructive.

Nick Chilvers. January 2017.