Appendix 3 Cambridge Library Enterprise Centre Review
Report on Spokes – Cllr. M. Shellens

1. **Introduction:**

1.1   The following comments are driven largely by input from Members. They reflect the views of Members on the effectiveness of the Spokes system as it has been working and their recommendations for any necessary improvements.

1.2   It is recommended that the points raised are taken to Constitution and Ethics Committee for determination.

1.3   From the submissions received on this area, it is clear the role played by Spokes is widely seen as an integral part of the Committee system. It has an important role toplay in formulating policy and could go a long way to building consensual politics.

1.4   Most Members are clear as to what their vision for Spokes is. Unfortunately, though each is clear in his/her own mind, there are significant divergences of views held between them.

1.5   In this situation it is not surprising that levels of satisfaction with how well the system is working vary significantly.

1.6   The differences, which derive from different perceptions of the role of Members, have major implications for:

- the purpose of Spokes;
- the purpose of Spokes meetings;
- the interface between Spokes and Group Members;
- the purpose and conduct of Committee meetings;
- the schedule of document release and the sequencing of meetings.

2. **Purpose of Spokes:**

2.1   All appear to agree that:

- Spokes are supposed to be the Group experts on their Committee subjects and should havedetailed knowledge of :
    - ➢ how the CCC teams work;
    - ➢ how national policy might affect local issues.
- Spokes should be the first port of call for Members of their own Group who have casework which needs specialist advice;
- Spokes act as a communication channel:
    - ➢ taking Group views to the Spokes meeting, and;
    - ➢ reporting back to the Group information from and discussion at those meetings.

2.2   It is clearly unreasonable to expect Spokes to commit their Groups to a particular stance at the Spokes meeting before the Group has had a chance to hear feedback on the discussion at Spokes.

3.   Issue of Principle:

3.1   Key to this discussion is a key principle on which members are split. There are contrasting views:

a) Committee Members are mandated to vote in accordance with the Group view.

b) Committee Members retain personal autonomy and freedom to vote according to their conscience.

a)Committee Members are mandated to vote in accordance with the Group view.
- Once the Group view has been determined then:
- subject only to party discipline and unforeseen absence
- with the voting strength of each Group on each Committee known in advance,
- Committee meetings become a performance,
  - often following a "dress rehearsal" at Spokes,
  - and the outcome has been predetermined.
- It follows that decisions are effectively being taken in private meetings.
- This does not meet the requirement for transparency and public accountability.
- This Council faces many potentially contentious decisions.
- It is highly desirable for decision making to be in public.

b) Committee Members retain personal autonomy.
- Spokes meetings are unable to decide issues
- but remain:
  - an efficient way for Officers to have preliminary discussion with Spokes ;
  - and an opportunity for an exchange of views between Groups.
- The result at Committee is not knowable in advance.
- Debate at Committee is to be encouraged and indeed stimulated by the meeting Chairs.
- Committee Members are free to bring their personal stance and late information to meetings.
- It is not the role of the Chair to drive through pre-determined decisions.

4.   Other administrative matters:

4.1   Spokes meetings are important.
If a Spokesperson is unavoidably unable to attend, the Group should ensure that a substitute, having been briefed, attend the meeting.

4.2   Issues for determination or discussion at Committee should be placed on the forward plan.

4.3   Members need to be mindful of the matters to be discussed at the next meeting and come prepared. (Whilst this is the responsibility of Members, it would also be helpful for Chairs to remind Members of forthcoming items in the course of the previous meeting).

4.4   Spokes must be allowed to suggest items for consideration and debate at future meetings.

4.5   Spokes need to help guide the work of the service and direction of travel.

4.6   Working papers need to be provided in good time and need to be concise and comprehensible.

4.7   Before the main discussion of a subject at Spokes   they must have time to discuss the item with their Group members and should come to meetings having obtained the view of their Group.

4.8   This requires skilful scheduling of the issue of papers (see 4.6) above).

4.9   The consequences of the decisions made by Constitution and Ethics Committee as a result of this paper should be reflected in a detailed job description for Spokes.

4.10   Members bring different skills and experience to their roles. If an agenda has an item for which someone other than Spokes could offer informed advice, should a mechanism be found for this to happen?

5.   Allowances:

5.1   A number of questions were raised by Members regarding Spokes allowances:

   a)   Should SRAs reflect the size of the Group? Given that only one aspect of their role is directly related to the size of the Group, this seems problematic.

   b)   Should attendance at Spokes meetings be monitored and published monthly?

   c)   Where Spokes fail to attend a significant proportion of meetings or otherwise fail to discharge their duties should part of their allowances be clawed back?

   d)   Are the responsibilities of Spokes and vice chairs broadly similar?
         If not, should their SRAs be re-evaluated?

The section on Spokes above raises significant issues affecting the way this council needs to run if it is to be more effective. Once the decisions of Constitution and Ethics Committee are known, training should be arranged for all Members. Where Members are unable to attend that training, alternative means of delivering the necessary messages should be found.

MS 14/09/15