

Agenda Item No: **Report No: 91/08**
Report Title: Scrutiny Review of Role of Ward Councillors
Report To: Council **Date: 14 May 2008**
Ward(s) Affected: All
Report By: Scrutiny Panel, Chair - Councillor J N MacCleary
Contact Officer(s): David Feintuck, Scrutiny Secretary

Background

- 1** At the Scrutiny Committee meeting in February 2007, the Chief Executive submitted the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research summary "Ward Councillors and Community Leadership: a future perspective" (Appendix 1) as a possible addition to the Committee's Work Programme.
- 2** The Scrutiny Committee adopted the Remit (Appendix 2) with a timescale ending in May 2008. The Group Leaders approved a Panel consisting of Councillors J N MacCleary (Chair on election), M A Cutress and P A Howson to conduct the Review.
- 3** The Panel followed the internal document 'Good Practice for Reviews', examined the Council's Role Profile for Councillors, reviewed relevant literature and interviewed the Leader of the Council, the Leader of the Minority Group and the Chief Executive. The Panel met four times and the notes taken at those meetings helped inform this Report.

Information and Research

- 4** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation research considers the role which ward councillors can play in community leadership and investigates how the role is likely to change over the next five years as neighbourhood working and legislative and policy changes impact on the role of local government.
- 5** Although there had to date been no substantive responses from neighbouring councils to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research, other councils had a variety of approaches to developing agreed ways of working with councillors as did the Improvement and Development Agency's Councillors' Guide and forthcoming Councillors' Checklist. The South East Employers Members Charter also offered a broad and detailed approach. The Panel considered these approaches merited further consideration in the future.

- 6 Provision for ward councillors to bring matters to the attention of the Scrutiny Committee as provided for in the Councillor Call for Action (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) already exists within the Council's Constitution.
- 7 The primary recommendation of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research is for the development of a Ward Councillor Compact, a voluntary two-way agreement between the council and councillors that would help define the future role of ward councillors and address issues about support, development and performance standards.
- 8 Important areas for action within a Compact would be:
 - The Scrutiny role
 - Training and support
 - Communications
 - Councillor recruitment
 - Councillors as Community Leaders
- 9 The Committee was aware that the Corporate Management Team was currently considering general guidance on issues which could be referred to ward councillors for their information to assist them in knowing what is happening in their wards.
- 10 A future Compact might lead to a review of elements of the Constitution re- councillors' roles and Scrutiny in particular. Whatever approach was adopted, individual councillors' own methods of working should be encouraged.

Conclusions

- 1) That a Ward Councillor Compact, whether voluntary or compulsory, was desirable to set out the council's and councillors' expectations, best practice and commitment to each other and to the community;
- 2) That the content of such a Compact (Draft, Appendix 3) would require full councillor consultation and further research, resulting in broad agreement between current councillors and political groups and with a view to presenting the Compact to candidates at the 2011 District Council election;
- 3) That a Compact would need to be accompanied by an agreed Action Plan (Draft, Appendix 4); and
- 4) That councillor training would form an important aspect of a Compact and a list of the courses currently offered to staff which could readily be expanded to be offered to councillors is at Appendix 5.

Recommendations

That the Scrutiny Committee be requested to set up a Panel with a remit based on this Report to take forward the development of a Ward Councillor Voluntary Compact and Action Plan and to report back to Council within the municipal year 2008/09.

Background Papers

Role Profile of All Councillors (Constitution Part 11, Section 2)

Information Pack compiled for the Committee

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ward Councillors and Community Leadership – summary of Joseph Rowntree Foundation research

Appendix 2 – Review Remit

Appendix 3 – Draft Ward Councillor Compact

Appendix 4 – Draft Compact Action Plan

Appendix 5 - Standard Training Course Programme