DOCUMENT C

Development of Voluntary Ward Councillor Compact and Action Plan – Councillors Questionnaire – Collated responses

The purpose of the compact is primarily to provide benefits and opportunities to enhance councillors' performance, particularly on ward matters.

The Panel is considering recommending integrating the compact with the Councillor Role Profile already in the Constitution.

Respondents are numbered in the left-hand column, comments from councillors in plain and from officers in *italics*.

- Do you think this is the right method of proceeding?

1	Should be very general and not prescriptive
2	Should be up to individuals
3	Yes
8	Yes
4	*Yes*
5	*Yes – the Constitution is and should be the primary source of guidance and information on standards and expectations of both councillors and officers*
6	*Compact is unnecessary – councillors' main role is to be turned to by their public – role does not need to be defined*
7	*This is really a matter for the councillors to decide, since this initiative mostly puts obligations on them. For some, it will be a useful means of codifying what is expected of them. For others, it will be seen as unduly prescriptive and inflexible, as all councillors have their own particular "style" in doing the job.* *From the officer viewpoint, the important thing is that there are adequate resources to support whatever initiatives are proposed.*

- Are there any additions/amendments you would suggest to the draft compact or action plan (also attached)?

2	Do not believe Role Profile of All Councillors is useful – too imprecise
8	Change 'compact' to 'contract' - or explain 'compact'
5	*This Compact is weakened by making it an entirely voluntary process. There are some elements of the compact which should be mandatory, ie a basic expectation that all councillors will sign up to….whilst other elements could be left voluntary;* *The standards/expectations set out in the compact seem entirely reasonable and perhaps the compact could include a reasonable time limit in which the mandatory elements must be completed (say 2 years) and maybe within 4 years for other voluntary elements;* *The Compact could say that every councillor will have a published Personal Development Plan which records their training/learning and development objectives/targets*
7	*I think that there should be specific training requirements for councillors on the Licensing Committee and the Planning Applications Committee, as these committees exercise a high profile, quasi-judicial role, and operate in a fast changing legal environment. In the past, we have suggested that PAC members do at least 10 hours per year of training.*

- Are there any ***clear, achievable and time-limited*** targets you would suggest for the action plan?

2	Not in favour of Action Plan in this area
8	2-4 weeks
4	*Councillors should engage with voluntary groups within 3 months*
5	*All councillors to complete their induction training (mandatory elements) within 12 months of being elected;* *All councillors to complete a Training Needs Analysis (TNA)within 12 months of being elected and a requirement to review the TNA once a year;* *All councillors to set personal development targets each year within their personal action plan;*
6	*Consider compact/action plan unnecessary*

- Do you have any suggestions to add to the Council's proposed commitment in the compact (eg enabling councillors to use council resources to conduct local surveys, providing a single officer as a channel for dealing with queries)?

2	Can't separate Council and councillors – would not wish to use just one officer
3	Might prevent waste of senior officers' time
5	*The buddy scheme could be useful provided there are clear guidelines and protocols.* *It might not be appropriate for councillors to use council resources for 'local surveys'. This could have significant/detrimental effect on already limited resources and could undermine or conflict with 'official' or planned consultations. However, some limited support for this could be accommodated if a small number of such local consultations were recommended to/approved by Cabinet and built into the Council's existing consultation programme. There is also an opportunity to link such local consultations into existing mechanisms such as the Local Area Partnerships, Face the People events etc.*
7	*Yes, the initiative must be properly resourced and have the right sort of officer support. The idea of councillors doing surveys is a case in point: surveys need to worded appropriately; have the right sample size to allow sensible conclusions to be drawn; and resources available for analysis and circulation of results. All in all, such surveys can be quite resource intensive.* *I find that councillors' tendency is to use chief officers as the channel for many of their queries. Despite officers' best efforts to provide information on "who to contact", many councillors do not make the effort to find out whom to go to for an immediate response to a query, and instead expect chief officers to channel it to the right person in their departments. This is slower and less efficient.*

The following headings are the priorities identified in the draft action plan:

Communications

- Do you think there are sufficient opportunities for councillors to raise ward issues?

1	Direct contact with Council officers solves most issues
2	Would have done if recent amendment at Council had been passed
3	Explanation of ward issues needed for new councillors
4	Most of the time, yes
4	*Current arrangements are fine*
5	*Ward issues tend to be considered on an ad hoc basis. There could be scope to co-ordinate this through more co-ordinated area based consultation*
7	*Yes, by phone, e-mail, fax or face to face. Queries are most cost-effectively dealt with informally.* *Whilst the use of a high profile setting for political purposes is understood, the "ward issues" slot at Council often involves matters which could be resolved by a simple phone call. Instead, senior staff may have a lot of extra work in providing a full written response at a subsequent Cabinet meeting*

- Do you have any suggestions for making better use of Public Question Time at Council and Cabinet (Council Procedure Rule 10)?

1	Would like genuine discussion with petitioners at Council and Cabinet; the old Review Boards offered the opportunity to press issues
4	*No – arrangements have evolved and improved over time*
5	*By inviting questions from existing community groups/organisations/partners - there is an opportunity to link this with the LSP/Area Partnerships*
7	*Longer lead times for staff to research and prepare responses to questions*

- Do you have any suggestions for making better use of Councillor Question Time at Council and Committees (Council Procedure Rules 11.2 to 11.7)?

2	Don't use printed versions of questions and responses

- Do you have any suggestions for improving the way we deal with petitions at Council (Council Procedure Rule 12)?

8	Copy of petition to be given to councillors

- Would you wish to encourage all councillors to use an email account/personal website?

2	Definitely not – no councillor should be forced to use any method with which he or she is uncomfortable
3	Voluntary use only
8	Yes
4	*Would be advantageous if all councillors used email*
5	*There are potential risks to the authority of encouraging personal websites/email accounts etc particularly in relation to FOI, legal implications etc which would need to be controlled. There are also concerns regarding the likely resource implications of this as well as the necessary IT support. Also, the Council must ensure that councillors are available to their electorate/accessible through a variety of channels – not just electronic means.*
7	*Yes*

Training and Induction

- Would you favour all councillors being encouraged to attend specified training sessions and, if so, which ones (eg public speaking, using email)? Full details are at http://intranet/staff/2158.asp

1	Computer training well covered, staff excellent, other matters on request
2	Councillors already encouraged to attend such courses
3	Yes – public speaking, communication and training updates
8	Yes – anything which would benefit councillors and the Council
4	*Yes – computers/email*
5	*Yes – some training should be mandatory and should be reflected in a councillor's Personal Action/Learning Plan. The subjects we feel should be mandatory include – Risk Management, Performance Management and Data Quality.*
7	*Yes, particularly for councillors on Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Committee (see above)* *You might also want to focus on training for what are considered "key skills and competencies" for councillors.*

- Is there any training in addition to that already available which you would you wish to be provided (eg how internal processes work, how to contact officers on particular issues)?

2	Not personally – councillors who need training should identify it
8	Not always sure who to contact
5	*There is an opportunity as part of their induction programme, for all councillors (possibly linked to the buddy scheme) to be offered tours of the council offices primarily to meet staff. This could provide an important opportunity for new councillors.*
7	*No, can't think of anything at the moment, but would be willing to help, if required.*

- Would you favour a voluntary "buddy" scheme whereby experienced councillors or officers would offer support to newly elected councillors?

1	On request, perhaps
2	Group Leaders should fill that role
8	Yes, a support officer would be particularly useful
4	*Might be useful*
5	*Yes – Wealden Council operates a buddy scheme. Perhaps we could invite someone over to talk to Scrutiny about this?*
7	*Yes, that would be useful.*

Scrutiny

- How do you think the value of the Scrutiny process can be increased (eg encouraging outside participation, devoting more resources)?

2	Unconvinced Scrutiny method produces real results
3	Scrutiny should be explained to the community via District Link; Councillors should be made aware how to use the process; More officer resources needed.
4	Ensure all councillors understand how to take issues to Scrutiny for consideration for the Work Programme
4	*Realistic/achievable targets taking into account Council's responsibilities, resources and influence*
5	*Scrutiny does not have much of a profile within the Council, or amongst the public. It is not clear what 'added value' is provided from scrutiny work. If there is a genuine desire to encourage wider participation, there could be much more publicity/promotion about the scrutiny programme and requests to staff/public for their comments/suggestions.* *Scrutiny might be enhanced if each review was better resourced - ie depending on the nature of the review a small officer project team could be allocated to provide specific advice/support. However, it is appreciated that the Council has limited capacity and resources in this respect. From our past experience of best value reviews, this work can easily become resource hungry unless it is very clearly defined and scoped.*
6	*There should be a very limited amount of Scrutiny with councillors working closely with officers only on issues that directly add value to services wherein most officers are already severely stretched delivering.*
7	*I think we might need more training for councillors on the scrutiny role. Outside participation / assistance may also be helpful, in some cases. Overall, I think LDC has had many of the same problems as other smaller district councils in providing a rigorous scrutiny process*

- Are there any other ways in which the participation of back-bench councillors can be increased?

1	Something like the old Review Boards
2	Review powers delegated to officers; Return to committee system when the law allows; Make Council meetings more meaningful
3	Group Leaders should encourage backbench participation
4	Depends on individual councillor
5	*Is there an opportunity to encourage all councillors to play a part in or take an active interest in the Area Partnerships which operate under the LSP? This could also combine with the CRP Face the People events? This could help to give the APs a greater perceived democratic accountability whilst ensuring there was appropriate partnership working at community level.*

Community Engagement

- Can you suggest how councillors can better connect/explain Council services to the community?

2	Councillor not propagandists for the Council – District Link does this – councillors should deal with enquiries as received
3	Local newsletters; Surgeries – perhaps once or twice a year and advertised in District Link
8	Better advertising in local press and information offcies
7	*Training is the key, supported by easily accessible information on the LDC web site and in paper/card form*

- Have you any suggestions to increase public attendance at council meetings?

1	Provide facilities for discussion – unlike procedure at Council and Cabinet
2	Council should not be limited to Notices of Motion. Only packed meeting was Cabinet re- National Park and Chyngton Way, Seaford
3	Public will attend only if interesting local issues under discussion
8	Better advertising and public survey
5	*Not sure this should be our objective. We should be looking at increasing people's opportunities to influence decisions (which they can't do simply by attending meetings) – website debates/blogs? Online voting? Text votes? Public noticeboards in our receptions for people to leave their comments?*
7	*Whilst the emphasis is procedural (e.g. approving minutes of previous meetings, debating notices of motion etc), it will not normally attract the public to the meetings.* *Where councillors are making decisions that are important to the public (eg the annual budget or the Planning Apps Committee), people will be more likely to come*

- Have you any suggestions as to how partnership working and representation on outside bodies could be improved?

2	Outside body and partnership representatives should provide annual written report subject to questions
3	District Link and newsletters; Encourage more bodies to request councillor participation
5	*Could look at the way the Council/councillors engage with the Area Partnerships. They are becoming very active groups and could link in with our own consultation and empowerment agenda.*
7	*More feedback from LDC reps on outside bodies, to other councillors and senior officers , so we all have a better feel for what is happening in our partnership activities and how this relates to what we are trying to achieve as an organisation.*

Additional comments:

1	Any way which suits the ward, the councillor and officers is acceptable – any code should be as general as possible. Facilities for discussion with public outside formal Council meetings – fundamental change needed. Return to Review Boards would help councillors become experts in particular areas.
9	I would suggest adoption of an introductory statement of purpose something like, "We are tasked with identifying changes required within Lewes District Council to encourage and facilitate the achievement of the increasing statutory requirement for Ward Councillors to improve effectiveness as 'connectors' between their community and the Council. This task requires the creation of a voluntary Compact describing: i) the role of Councillors interacting with their communities, and ii) the part Council Officers expect to play in supporting Councillor achievement of their roles."
4	*No mention in Compact re- being an Independent councillor*
5	*Government's new engagement agenda - proposals about community engagement, the role of the ward councillor, participatory budgeting etc are very relevant to this review;* *current wording in the Constitution extract refers to councillors having a 'management function' – slightly misleading;* *Council has a well-established staff development and appraisal scheme which could be adapted to meet some of the objectives within this Compact;* *one LAA target is aimed at increasing the percentage of people who think they can influence decisions in the local area - to be measured by the Place Survey in 2008 and again in 2010*