

Conclusions

- 5 The Panel concluded that the nature of the proposed Compact and Action Plan differed from that submitted in the May report by virtue of Council's decision that the arrangement should be voluntary. Compact content would, therefore, be only descriptive and not prescriptive.
- 6 For the same reason, the Panel took the view that an Action Plan as such was not appropriate. A list of suggestions for progressing the principles within the Compact and centred on the priorities identified in the May report was, however, desirable.

Recommendations

- 1) That the Compact (Appendix 2) be included in the Council's Constitution;
- 2) That the Revised Role of All Councillors (Appendix 3) be adopted (page W4 of the Council's Constitution);
- 3) That these documents, together with the suggested activities to help councillors fulfil the Compact and their constitutional role, be circulated to all councillors and included in future councillors' Induction Packs;
- 4) That the Head of Business Services be requested to review the arrangements for identifying the training needs of councillors with a view to offering training needs analysis and personal development plans if requested; and
- 5) That the political groups consider introducing a 'buddy' scheme for new councillors.

Background Papers

Council Report No 91/08

Council and Scrutiny Committee minutes

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Review Remit

Appendix 2 – Councillor Compact

Appendix 3 – Revised Role of All Councillors

Appendix 4 – Suggested activities to help councillors fulfil the Compact and their constitutional role

DRAFT WARD COUNCILLOR COMPACT v4

The purpose of this voluntary two-way agreement between the Council and councillors is to:

- set out the Council's expectations of the role, encouraging basic minimum standards of activity in each of the dimensions and functions of the job, combining specific tasks with suggested approaches, skills and behaviours;
- help define **best practice for ward councillors** and to suggest how to take that forward;
- set out the **Council's commitment** to provide support and training for councillors.

Expectations of the Role of Ward Councillor

Councillors should:

- **communicate** with the public via websites, blogs and surveys
- work with officers and political groups to identify and address their **training** needs
- identify areas suitable for **scrutiny** and involve the public and communities in the process
- look for ways to promote democracy and increase public and **community engagement** including town and parish councils and interest groups
- represent effectively and be an advocate for local residents, their communities and wards in their relations with the District Council and other local and national government bodies
- provide a conduit through which residents can make better use of council services and be the key link between council officers and local communities
- keep up-to-date with local concerns by drawing information from diverse sources including hard to reach groups

The Council's Commitment

The Council will:

- provide basic induction training, including how to contact relevant officers, plus continuous development in a variety of time slots and formats (including external training opportunities), strategically planned and including support and development in appropriate skills
- provide sufficient IT equipment and support to enable councillors to undertake their role
- disseminate relevant and useful ward intelligence to councillors including contacts for local organisations
- support councillors to enable them to engage actively with residents and community groups

Constitution Part 11, Section 2, page W4

Role Profile of All Councillors

- To collectively be the ultimate policy-makers and carry out a number of strategic and corporate executive functions fulfilling statutory and any additional locally determined requirements including participating effectively as a member of any committee to which the councillor is appointed;
- To respond to constituents' enquiries and representations fairly and impartially;
- To balance different interests identified within their ward and represent the ward as a whole;
- To be involved in decision-making where appropriate;
- To participate in councillor training and development;
- To be available to represent the Council on other bodies developing and maintaining a working knowledge of the authority's policies and practices in relation to the bodies;
- To maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics and comply with all the relevant Codes of Conduct and protocols;
- To develop and maintain a working knowledge of the Council's services, management, arrangements, powers, duties and constraints and develop good working relationships with the relevant officers of the Council;
- To contribute constructively to open government and modernisation through active encouragement to the community to participate in the governance of the district;
- To participate in the activities of any political group of which the councillor is a member;
- To champion the causes which best relate to the interests and sustainability of the community and campaign for the improvement of the quality of life of the community in terms of equality, economy and environment.

Suggested activities to help councillors fulfil the compact and their constitutional role

Communications:

- Make full use of IT provision including email and individual councillor website
- Provide local newsletters, surveys and surgeries

Training:

- Participate fully in the training available to councillors
- Take advantage of a “buddy” scheme for new councillors

Community Engagement:

- Use the Scrutiny process to raise community and ward issues
- Raise ward issues at Council and encourage the use of public question time at Council and Cabinet
- Participate in community organisations and establish how they can better connect with Council services and resources

How Personnel determines councillors' training needs and how councillors' training needs analysis and personal development plans could operate.

At present we determine Councillors' training needs in four ways:

- Following elections, when newly elected councillors (and others who want it) are assigned to a number of training courses depending upon their experience and interests
- An annual review by each committee. In many cases the training needs are taken care of at committee level rather than by Personnel on a corporate basis
- Individual requests, either directly to personnel or following notification that spare places on existing courses, usually IT, exist.
- Individual training or conferences related to committee or lead councillor work, usually identified by service officers in consultation with the councillor concerned. Personnel are not usually involved.

The detail would have to be worked out, but, if it was wanted, Personnel could co-ordinate an annual training needs analysis exercise for councillors in a similar way to that for staff. That could lead to individual personal development plans for councillors. But for staff the exercise includes involvement from managers and departments so that what is identified is not just personal choice but also includes training that is needed by the organisation. Personnel can't know what is needed in each department and by each individual so we do this by having a training co-ordinator in each department who is responsible for:

- Acting as co-ordinator of training and development activities within their department.
- Acting as a link between their department and Personnel.
- Agreeing their department's training plan with Personnel as part of the Training Needs Analysis System.

I think a similar system would be needed for councillors, probably at group level. This has been tried in the past, but there were problems both for the co-ordinators and for Personnel in getting responses and the system was abandoned. But without some view, either cross party or at group level, on what councillors' must be able to do the only training requested will continue to be personal choice.

Further work on the detail would be needed if the panel felt this was a suitable approach.

John Clark, Head of Business Services

1 December 2008