

LARGER PRINT COPY AVAILABLE PLEASE TELEPHONE: 01493 846325

WARD MEMBERS' WORKING GROUP

24 April 2013 – 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors Castle, M Coleman, Fairhead and J Smith.

An apology for absence was received from Councillors Hacon, Hanton and T Wainwright.

Mrs L Mockford (Group Manager – Governance), Mr R Hodds (Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer) and Miss H Notcutt (Neighbourhood Manager).

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Councillor J Smith be appointed as Chairman of the Working Group.

2. ROLE OF WARD COUNCILLORS

The Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer reminded the Working Group that his report on the Role of Ward Councillors had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 28 February 2013. He reported that the role Ward Councillors should play in community leadership and strategic decision making had become a pressing issue for local authorities in the context of current policy and legislative changes.

The Member Services Manager reported that developing an empowered role for Ward Members would require major changes to the way local authorities, political parties and communities work with elected members. These are long term issues, many of which are dependent on changes top the cultural of local authorities and local political groups. He stated that the development of a Ward Councillor compact, a voluntary two way agreement between the Council and elected members would help to define the future role and address issues about support development and performance standards. The Ward Councillor compact would set out the Councillors commitment to provide minimum levels of support and training for members and the Council's expectations of the Ward Councillor role encouraging basic minimum standards of activity and performance in each of the dimensions and functions of the job.

The Working Group gave consideration to tabled papers which set out a draft Ward Councillor Compact, a Role Profile of all Councillors and suggested activities to help Councillors fulfil the Compact and their constitutional role.

In discussing the Scrutiny Officer's report, together with the tabled papers with regard to the Ward Councillor Compact, the Working Group discussed the following issues:-

- A discussion on the “old” committee system whereby the Council’s functions were subject to a committee system with direct reporting to full Council that involved all Members of the Council in the decision making process. This system had been replaced in 1999 with a Cabinet system which had significantly changed the role of elected members in the decision making process.
- The possible appointment of part-time political assistants.
- The introduction of a mentoring/buddying system for new Councillors.
- To issue all Members of Council with an abridged version of the Council’s Constitution to possibly exclude the sections of the Constitution that relate to contractual and financial standing orders.
- The development of Ward Member activity within the community with a possibility of appointing Community Champions. This community engagement role would also include engagement with young people.
- The Working Group’s endorsement to the continuation of the Ward Budget Scheme which allows elected members to engage further with the public through this process.
- The need to enhance and development the Members’ Handbook issued to newly elected Members of Council.
- The issue of equipment required for Members to carry out their Council role effectively bearing in mind the forthcoming proposal to introduce a new Committee Management System which will require Members to use i-Pads/laptops in meetings rather than issue Members with hard copy agendas.
- How to deal with casework and on issues of engaging with the community.

RESOLVED:

(i) That the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet be advised of the Working Group’s endorsement for the continuation of the Ward Budget Scheme.

(ii) That a further meeting of the Working Group be held to discuss in detail the following issues:-

- (a) A mentoring/buddying system for new Councillors.
- (b) To examine the content of the current Members’ Handbook issued to newly elected Members.
- (c) To discuss what equipment Members need to carry out their role as Councillors.
- (d) How to deal with casework and engaging with the community.
- (e) To fully examine the proposal to introduce a formal Ward Councillor Compact which would include a role profile of all Councillors and suggested activities to help Councillors fulfil the Compact and their constitutional role.

3. CLOSURE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 7.00 pm.