

**Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny
Management Committee**

10 February 2020

Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Children, Education & Communities
and the Director of Governance

Supporting and Engaging Local Councillors

Summary

1. The Committee agreed to incorporate within its current work plan an overview report, setting out existing practices to help and support Councillors in their roles and in engaging their communities.

Background

2. In December 2012, the House of Commons Communities & Local Government Committee produced a report presenting their findings on their review into 'Councillors at the Frontline'.
3. At that time, the review considered a number of issues about the role of councillors on local authorities: the nature of their relationship with the communities they serve; approaches to recruiting candidates; barriers that might deter people from becoming councillors; and whether councillors are given the support and training they need to carry out the job effectively.
4. The review urged all councils to consider how best to provide support to their councillors and assist them to ensure they have an active role in their communities. It drew many conclusions around representation, diversity, recruitment of candidates for election and training and development of potential candidates, as well as serving Councillors. To see the Committee's recommendations in full:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomloc/432/43202.htm>

5. This Council has always endeavoured to support its Councillors in their varying roles on the Council once elected from induction through to the support required for longer serving Councillors, enabling them to develop in their continuing years of service. Naturally, the level and range of support is dependent upon dedicated resources.

Analysis

6. Support to Councillors

The following support is provided upon election to Councillors:

(i) **Training** incorporating:

- Planned induction for all new Members upon election to the Council;
- Refresher training for longer serving, more experienced Members upon re-election and across years of service; framed around areas of responsibility;
- Seminars/external conferences and activities for elected Members as part of a commitment to ongoing training;
- Close liaison with the Local Government Association (LGA) on dedicated training and development, including delivery by the LGA to York Councillors of tailored training/advice;
- A dedicated but currently small annual budget;

(ii) **Officer support:** As part of their daily function and responsibility, Officers across all Council Directorates provide dedicated support to Councillors in their varying roles from simple enquiries on issues to briefings on significant issues in their wards or in managing key meetings in which they are involved or have a role, eg Chairing;

Specifically, also Executive Support Assistants are provided to each of the main Leader roles to offer PA/administrative support;

(iii) **Members Enquiries Team:** Based within the Customer & Corporate Services Directorate, this small team helps Councillors report service issues and problems within their wards and tracks progress on resolutions to reported issues, eg defective street lighting, potholes;

(iv) **Facilities:** Councillors are based within the West Offices Council Complex. Each political group has a dedicated Group Room with

meeting and computer facilities for the use of Councillors. Photocopying and printing facilities are available;

- (v) **Allowances:** The current Council's Members Allowances Scheme is attached for reference at **Annex 1** to this report and covers the requirements for all Councillors to receive a basic allowance, supplemented by one Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for any additional higher responsibility allocated. The Scheme covers additional travel/subsistence, cycle and dependent carer's expenses which Councillors may also claim;

The Committee is reminded that in December 2019 the Council accepted the review and refresh of allowances for Councillors recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The Committee is reminded that Annex 1 is yet to be updated further to Council's endorsement of the IRP recommendations. Any changes required will be addressed as part of the ongoing 'tidying up' exercise of the Constitution currently underway. It would not be appropriate for this Committee to suggest any review of those provisions given that Councillors allowances have only just been statutorily assessed independently by the appointed IRP.

- (vi) **ICT Support:** Councillors in York also receive a laptop or tablet to enable them to stay properly connected with and in relation to their Council business;

7. In terms of engaging with prospective Councillors or candidates, the Council currently liaises with political groups to provide advance details of induction days and any early agreed training. Where possible, advance notice of dates in the calendar of meetings is also provided (eg Council meeting dates), in anticipation of any newly elected Members having commitments. The Committee will be aware that often timing of 'Committee' and other meetings can be an issue, particularly when newly elected in terms of having to make difficult lifestyle adjustments and compromises as a new Councillor.

Support to Members on Engaging with their Communities

8. The review undertaken by the House of Commons Communities & Local Government Committee identified that 'Councillors should be at the centre of community life, well known and respected by those they represent, and empowered to effect change within their local areas'

9. During 2017, the then Communities and Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee undertook a review into ward funding and improvements in some ways of working, culminating in a final report to the Executive on 16 March 2017. The Executive acknowledged the importance of community infrastructure and community engagement and in terms of specific relevance to this report, recognised and actively encouraged Councillors and Groups to engage in training opportunities. They also encouraged Political Groups to provide peer support to their ward members to enable them to progress schemes in their wards.
10. Since then, in August 2019, the Executive received and agreed a report reviewing the effectiveness of Ward Committees and in particular devolving more budgets to wards. The Executive also endorsed some specific improvements for helping develop Councillors in their community role, as referred to in paragraph 13 below.
11. Generally speaking, ward working is progressing well. Ward members are in contact with their Community Involvement Officers (CIOs) and in most cases ward team meetings have now taken place. Wards have either rolled forward priorities from last year or are developing new priorities with their residents.
12. Community Involvement Officers are the main support to members in their role as ward councillors– traditionally through Ward Team and Ward Committee meetings – but more recently via more innovative methods including focus group sessions, stakeholder meetings, action days, drop-ins, a Christmas market place, cycle abouts, joint events with the local primary school, surveys, etc.
13. From June to September 2019 an intern from the University of York was placed with the Communities & Equalities Team to research how Members engaged successfully with ward residents, covering all demographics including age, race, faith, income, occupation, education and sexual orientation. The research was based on a representative sample of six wards and involved talking with Members, residents and community groups with a view to identifying suitable methods of engagement for particular areas and demographics. The aim is to now develop a toolkit, which can be used by Members, city-wide, to inform their choice of engagement methods both with their ward as a whole, and with particular groups within it.

14. As ward working was covered only very briefly within the overall member induction it is proposed to run some additional tailored sessions for Members. It is suggested that these cover:
 - Processes around all aspects of ward funding
 - Getting the best from your CIO
 - Sharing between Members of best practice in engaging residents and effective use of ward budgets
15. There have been two new appointments to the Communities and Equalities Team. The first is one additional CIO for wards; allowing a better sharing out of the wards amongst CIOs enabling them to be more directly involved in wards, developing projects and in facilitating efficient delivery of highways and HEIP schemes.
16. The second has been appointed to work with York's minority communities in order to seek an understanding of the communities that are present in the city, and map who they are together with their needs, interests and perspectives. This CIO will take a community development approach, empowering communities and increasing their capacity to bring about change for themselves.

Consultation

17. No consultation was required on this report at this stage, which is for information purposes initially.

Options

18. (i) Having regard to the information provided in this report, the Committee can choose to note it; or

(ii) Identify any potential gaps in provision or further information it wishes to receive at a future meeting.

Council Plan 2019-23

19. Whilst this report does not in itself materially affect how the work of scrutiny can support and develop the Council's overall priorities to set out in the new Council Plan 2019-23, how Councillors are supported and how

they engage with their communities can impact on the Council's development and achievements.

Implications

20. There are no known implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

Risk Management

21. There are no known risks associated with the recommendations in this report.

Recommendations

22. The Committee is asked to note the information provided and consider whether they wish to receive any further information at a future meeting in relation to supporting Councillors or helping them engage with their communities.

Reason: To be confident that Councillors are being thoroughly supported in their various roles including that of community involvement and engagement.

Contact Details

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Report Approved

Date

30.01.20

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

None

All

Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

House of Commons Communities & Local Government Committee report –
December 2012

Annexes:

Annex A – Members Scheme of Allowances