

## Member Services Proposals

### 1. Induction and Training

The main issues raised by members were:

- 1.1 Although members generally feel that they have adequate information and training opportunities it is clear that this can always be improved upon to help members both in their governance role and when supporting their constituents.
- 1.2 It is recommended that a more detailed and comprehensive Induction Programme is developed and this would not only cover how this Council works but also how Local Government fits into the wider national and local context together with the role and remit of other public services in the borough such as the health service.
- 1.3 It was felt that it would be beneficial and it is therefore recommended that the Induction Programme could be supported and accompanied by the production of an easily accessible comprehensive pack of information for all Councillors that would be reviewed and reissued annually. It should contain details of what the Council does and how it works together with individual descriptions of front line services and the key contacts for each of those services. Signposts to and contacts for services not provided by this Council would also be helpful and should also be included.
- 1.4 It is also recommended that a comprehensive training and development programme should be devised for the life of the Council supported by an annual Work Plan that is incorporated within the Calendar of meetings. Training and development should be offered to members on particular subjects at varying levels which should reflect and accommodate the knowledge and experience of individual members. The vast majority of this programme would be provided internally and joint training carried out with officers and members together where appropriate.

### 2. Member Support

The main issues raised by member were:

- 2.1 This is generally the area where members feel that more could be done to provide better support, guidance and information through having a consistent continuous direct contact point in the Chief Executive's office. At the same time members would like to see this take some of the pressure off the Management Team who are increasingly trying to fulfil this role themselves.

### ***Member Enquiry System***

- 2.2 Overall, members see the value of the centralised Member Enquiry System that was introduced last year. The vast majority of members use it and report that it works well for general enquiries. It still requires some refinement and it is essential that the information is provided within the agreed timescales and in a helpful format.
- 2.3 There are two specific areas where it is felt that the general member Enquiries System does not provide members with the information that is needed:

#### ***a. Residents' Issues***

When members are approached direct by residents it tends to be on a more specific and/or urgent point than the present Member Enquiries System is capable of dealing with. In some circumstances members have found themselves then caught in difficult situations and with sensitive knowledge of particular residents which puts them in a position of personal responsibility and liability.

In order to try and prevent this situation from occurring and members being exposed to these personal risks it has been suggested and is therefore recommended that the comprehensive information pack provided to members as part of the induction programme should also enable members to immediately identify which service and who at the Council the resident needs to contact. The member can then provide the resident with that information on the spot at the time so that they can make that direct contact themselves. This will then take any liability or risk away from the member, who will still be kept abreast of the progress of the issue and, who will always have the ability to pursue it at any time on behalf of their constituent.

#### ***b. Urgent Issues - Out of hours***

In the unlikely event that anything operational occurs outside of normal office hours that members are made aware of then the member should contact the Council' "Out of Hours" service to report it and it will be dealt with by the appropriate "on call" staff. If it is something that is more urgent and important then members have the contact details of the Management Team and should phone or text one of them.

### ***Members' Central Office Support***

- 2.4 The lack of resource and capacity in the Chief Executive's Office to provide adequate member support was of a general concern and now considered to be a false economy with Management Team increasingly having to provide more administration, coordination and communication themselves in its absence.

2.5 Members also highlighted that they would like a greater level of consistency and continuity from this support. It is therefore recommended that at least one full time permanent employee will be dedicated to support members and the Management Team, including the Mayor, in the Chief Executive's office. This person will be the consistent and constant communication point of contact for all members. This person will have a full appreciation and understanding of all activities across the Council and will be in the best position to be able to provide a comprehensive level of information to members. This will also include a review to improve communications with members including the content of the Green/White papers etc. It will be their responsibility to proactively communicate with members particularly on any up and coming ward issues including coordinating periodic "Ward Walks" and any liaison that is necessary with other officers.