

**REPORT TO: NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
- 13 JANUARY 2003**

**REPORT ON: SCHEME OF DECENTRALISATION – ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFINGS**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT**

**REPORT NO: 31-2003**

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To seek approval of a protocol which aims to ensure regular and consistent exchange of information between elected members and Council officers in relation to implementation of the Council's Scheme of Decentralisation.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committee:

2.1 approves the attached protocol (Appendix A).

## **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 None.

## **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 One of the key principles of Local Agenda 21 is that decisions on local matters are taken locally.

4.2 The Council's Scheme of Decentralisation is part of its commitment to "bringing the Council closer to its communities". Effective operation of this scheme will ensure that all sections of the community are more actively engaged and empowered to participate in decision-making.

4.3 It is also the Council's intention to strengthen local contact and to ensure that local needs are met locally by promoting community engagement and officer contact at a local level.

## **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Council's Scheme of Decentralisation addresses all communities. It recognises that, within more affluent areas, there will also be specific local difficulties which the Council requires to address. Similarly, the Scheme seeks to engage and empower citizens living in those communities that exhibit greater signs of stress.

5.2 By these actions, the Council aims to reduce inequalities and promote equality of access.

## **6.0 BACKGROUND**

6.1 Since its adoption in 1997 (as approved in February 1997), the City Council has continued to refine the operation of its Scheme of Decentralisation with a view to bringing the Council closer to its communities, and respond to issues being raised locally through Neighbourhood Forums, community organisations etc.

6.2 Following the most recent review, the Council Management Team has recommended that clearer guidelines be introduced, setting out the relationship between elected members and officers supporting the Decentralisation process.

6.3 The adoption of these guidelines will assist the Council and its partners in preparing for implementation of community planning beyond the local Government White Paper which, it is anticipated, will receive its Royal Assent in the spring of 2003.

6.4 Copies of the Scheme of Decentralisation and information relating to its implementation are available on request from the Director of Neighbourhood Resources and Development.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 Consultation has taken place with the Chief Executive, Directors of Support Services and Corporate Planning, and all other members of the City Council Management Team.

7.2 Neighbourhood Service Chairs have also been consulted in the preparation of this protocol.

## **8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

**Fraser R Patrick**  
**Director of Neighbourhood Resources and Development**

**20 December 2002**

## **“BRINGING THE COUNCIL CLOSER TO ITS COMMUNITIES” ELECTED MEMBER ENGAGEMENT**

### **1 Introduction**

The local elected member is the democratically elected representative whose primary function is to support all citizens within their defined Ward in accessing local authority services, and representing the views of the Ward within Council business.

Elected members are often members of political parties, but can also be independents. In addition to their Ward responsibilities, local elected members may carry responsibilities eg as the Convener of a Council Committee or an appointee of the Council to an outside body.

In developing its policies for Decentralisation, promoting community involvement and community learning and development, the Council requires to clarify the different roles of community representatives and that of the local elected members.

At its meeting on 11 November 2002, Dundee City Council adopted a Revised Scheme for the Operation of Community Councils, and also a report which set out the principles for recognising community organisations other than Community Councils which wished to represent the views of local people to the Council.

In both cases, subject to appropriate safeguards, the Council will recognise the legitimate aspiration of citizens to have their voice heard, and to bring influence to bear on Council decision-making.

At the heart of a healthy local democracy, there should be debate about a wide range of matters, including the dynamic between the local elected representative and others who have expressed a wish to become involved as active citizens within their locality.

### **2 Officer roles**

Within the framework of the Scheme of Decentralisation, the leadership for its implementation is vested in the Neighbourhood Resources and Development Department and, specifically, in the Neighbourhood Development Officer assigned to any given geography.

This officer is supported in carrying out this corporate role by a number of other staff, primarily the Chair of the Neighbourhood Service Team or local Area Partnership, who may be a senior officer drawn from another Council Department.

### **3 The engagement between elected members and officers**

Within the Councils Scheme of Decentralisation, it has been agreed that an officers grouping be established for each Neighbourhood Service Team (decentralisation area). All elected members should receive the minutes and reports relating to their area. The meetings themselves have been established as a discussion between officers of the Council and its community planning partners.

In order to ensure that elected members are kept closely informed and involved in this process, a baseline standard of formal and informal communication between officers and elected members is set out in the operating arrangements for the Scheme of Decentralisation:

- The Neighbourhood Development Officer will ensure that elected members receive advance notice of the dates of Neighbourhood Forums and other formal consultation events organised by the Council and involving community organisations and groups in their Ward.
- There will be a formal opportunity (no less frequently than once every quarter) for elected members to engage in a two-way briefing with Neighbourhood Development Officers. The Neighbourhood Service Team or Local Area Partnership Chair will also normally attend these meetings, and a note of the meeting will be maintained and passed to line supervisors, Chairs of the Neighbourhood Services Teams/Local Area Partnerships and the Chief Executive.
- The pattern of informal briefing between the Neighbourhood Development Officer and the elected member will be determined locally and should act as an arrangement whereby the local elected member and the Council's lead officer for the implementation of these policies are able to regularly exchange information and work on the basis of "no surprises".
- Given the development of e-mail communication, it is suggested that an e-mail briefing on, say a monthly basis, be used to ensure that communication is maintained.
- Elected members would normally receive, attached to that e-mail briefing, notes of any Community Council meetings, any meetings of Council recognised neighbourhood representative structures, information about any funding or project development within their Ward.

#### **4 The Neighbourhood Service Team role**

The role of the Neighbourhood Service Team is set out in the Scheme of Decentralisation. The title of this local officer grouping may vary to reflect other local initiatives but its remit/purpose remains unaltered. These local officer groupings should not be seen as a substitute for the effective operation of Council departments.

There will, however, be crosscutting issues which do not neatly fall into the remit of any one department and for which a corporate, local response is required.

The Neighbourhood Service Teams/Local Area Partnership (eg Better Neighbourhood Services Fund) are also mechanisms for bringing together representatives from different departments of the Council, from time to time, in order that dialogue with community representatives, or in response to issues being raised at Neighbourhood Forums can be taken forward.

The principle that underpins Dundee's Scheme of Decentralisation is that it should not replace or substitute for the effective operation of service delivered by departments. This same principle holds true for the engagement of elected members. Elected members should direct enquiries from their constituents to the appropriate service department, and will continue to do so. If, however, elected members wish to discuss an issue which appears to cut across the remit of more than one department, then the Neighbourhood Development Officer would be available to discuss how to progress that issue.

#### **5 Community Planning**

In anticipation of the Local Government White Paper which will receive its Royal assent in Spring 2003, it is anticipated that the Council and its community planning partners will move towards the production of neighbourhood plans or local area statements.

These plans are likely to be integrated with what the Scottish Executive is referring to as local “community learning and development plans”. Dundee City Council anticipates that there will be Community Learning and Development Plans produced on boundaries that can be matched with those agreed for the operation of the Scheme of Decentralisation.

These plans will provide a focus for local elected members and officers, and will be generated in dialogue with local communities. It is not envisaged that the plans will be weighty documents, but that they will be accessible statements of community and local authority priorities for development and action.

Local area plans should provide the framework within which dialogue about the operation of the Scheme of Decentralisation and broader dialogue about the priorities for action between the local authority and the community can take place. These documents should, as they develop, provide a framework within which discussion between the local elected members, lead officers and community representatives can be taken forward.

## **6 Review**

The Council’s Scheme of Decentralisation is one of the principle means by which it can respond to community issues. The engagement and involvement of elected members is critical to the success of the operation of the scheme and it is essential that there is a regular review mechanism. In order that this happens, the Director of Neighbourhood Resources and Development will annually invite comment on the operation of the scheme from elected members and officers, and will respond to comments received in providing guidance to the Council Management Team or to the Council itself should there require to be a change in the policy or the mechanism put in place to support its implementation.

Stewart Murdoch, Manager, Neighbourhood Resources & Development