

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 11 November 2002

REPORT ON: SERVICES FOR COUNCILLORS

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE PLANNING

REPORT NO: 791-2002

1. PURPOSE

To inform members of the report "First Class Services for First Class Councillors" and to make recommendations on how members' support services can be improved in the light of that report's findings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:-

- (1) Note that most of the recommendations in the report, listed in Appendix One, have already been implemented in Dundee City Council.
- (2) Agree that the annual survey of satisfaction with members' support services be extended to include a number of other issues covered in the report, but that the survey of the message form service be discontinued as this has now served its purpose. A draft of the proposed Survey Questionnaire for 2003 is attached as Appendix Two.
- (3) Agree the draft protocol attached as Appendix Three, which is intended to ensure a consistent response from all departments to councillors' enquiries
- (4) Agree that members be consulted on any additional information which could usefully be included in the Council Diary, and that a handbook be produced for all members returned after the Election in 2003, containing relevant information on issues such as departmental structures and contacts, Codes of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, support services, sources of policy and research information and safety.
- (5) Note that a list of local byelaws and management rules, and a list of members' support services, will be added to the intranet as part of the process of expanding the electronic communication of reference information to members.
- (6) Agree that a new Service Plan for the Members Support Unit will be developed in line with the timetable for the new Corporate Plan in 2003, that performance on the indicators in the Service Plan will be reported to Committee on an annual basis, and that a similar exercise will be carried out during each four year term.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any costs associated with the recommendations in this report will be contained within existing budgets.

4. **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

The provision of good support services is one of the ways in which Council membership can be made accessible and attractive to a wide range of people.

5. **LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

None.

6. **BACKGROUND**

6.1 The McIntosh Commission and the Renewing Local Democracy Group (Kerley) recognised the importance of ensuring that councillors are provided with the support they require to carry out their duties effectively.

6.2 In February 2002, the report "First Class Services for First Class Councillors" was published jointly by COSLA and the Scottish Local Government Information Unit. This report analyses the results of a survey of members' support services, and identifies examples of good practice with a view to assisting Councils in reviewing the level of support provided to members.

6.3 Copies of the full report have been sent to Group Secretaries and made available in the Members' Lounge. A list of the key recommendations for local authorities is set out in Appendix One, along with a note of the current position on these in Dundee City Council.

6.4 Members will note that most of the recommendations have already been implemented in Dundee. However, there are a number of areas where some further work could be done to ensure that members' support needs are effectively identified and met. In particular:

- The report recommends that Councils should conduct regular audits/reviews of their elected members' support needs; that councillors should be involved in drawing up the terms of reference for and in conducting such reviews; that Councils should take a proactive approach to the development of individual training plans for members, based on regular analysis of areas in which members might benefit from additional information or skills-based training; and that Councils should make more effort to provide for councillors with caring responsibilities (for example, through creches or carers' allowances). In response it is recommended that the annual survey of satisfaction with members' support services be extended to cover issues such as training and demand for childcare provision. However, the survey of the message form service should be discontinued as it has now served its purpose. A draft questionnaire for the 2003 survey is attached for consideration as Appendix Two.
- The report recommends that Councils should consider introducing a system for logging and tracking constituent enquiries. It is felt that the present arrangements for enquiries are largely satisfactory, and there would be considerable cost involved in establishing a formal tracking system. However, a number of members have commented on inconsistencies in the response from departments to enquiries on behalf of constituents, and it is proposed that a protocol is agreed to ensure a prompt and consistent response in future. This would include, for example, target times for replies and the need for holding replies if information has to be gathered before a full response can be made. The protocol will also encourage use of e-mail in dealing with constituents'

enquiries, in response to the report's recommendation that particular attention should be given to the potential application of information technology in the process of dealing with constituency case-work. A draft of the proposed protocol is attached as Appendix Three.

- The report recommends that Councils should produce a formal guide to the support services available to elected members and that Councils should ensure that all new members have the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive induction programme. In response, it is recommended that members be consulted on any additional information which could usefully be included in the Council Diary, and that a handbook be produced for all members returned after the 2003 Election, containing information on issues such as departmental structures and contacts, Codes of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, support services, sources of policy and research information and safety. This will complement a structured induction programme for newly elected members.
- The report recommends that Councils should seek to further expand the electronic communication of reference information to Councillors. Much of the information suggested in the report is already provided, but it is recommended that steps be taken to add a list of local byelaws and management rules, and information on member support services, to the Intranet for members' reference.
- The report recommends that Councils should undertake formal evaluations of the support services provided to elected members at regular intervals. In response, it is recommended that a new Service Plan for the Members' Support Unit be developed in line with the timetable for the new Corporate Plan in 2003, that performance on the indicators in this plan be reported to Committee on an annual basis and that similar exercises be carried out during each four year term.

7. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive and Directors of Support Services and Finance have been consulted on this report.

Chris Ward
Director of Corporate Planning

31 October 2002

APPENDICES

- One: Key Recommendations from the SLGIU/COSLA Report and Current Situation in Dundee
Two: Draft Members' Services Questionnaire for 2003
Three: Draft Protocol for Dealing with Councillors' Enquiries

BACKGROUND PAPERS

First Class Services for First Class Councillors - Report of the SLGIU/COSLA Members' Support Services Survey - February 2002

APPENDIX ONE

SLGIU/COSLA REPORT ON SERVICES FOR COUNCILLORS KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCILS AND CURRENT SITUATION IN DUNDEE

Report's recommendations	Current situation
Councils should conduct regular audits/reviews of their elected members' support needs	<p>An annual survey is carried out to assess members' use of and satisfaction with the services provided by the Member Support Unit. This includes a section inviting comments and suggestions for improvements. A separate survey has assessed satisfaction with the message form service.</p> <p>A survey of training needs was carried out by Corporate Planning in 2000.</p>
Councillors should be involved in drawing up terms of reference for, and involved in conducting, reviews of their support needs.	Development of the Members' Support Survey was largely officer-led. Members should be asked to approve the revised questionnaire.
Every councillor in Scotland should be given their own e-mail account for council business	All members have an e-mail account, although in a number of cases the secretaries access these and print messages. Training on use of e-mail is available.
Every councillor should have access to a PC and printer for council related work, on at least a shared basis.	All members have access to a PC and printer, at least on a shared basis.
Those councils that do not currently provide internet access for elected members should consider doing so	Internet access is already provided and training is available.
Councils should consider providing some form of on-line link (e-mail or intranet) to councillors' homes	An on-line link to home computers is provided for any members who request this.
Councils should identify staff to whom members can direct requests for research support	Members currently ask Director of Corporate Planning or Members Support Supervisor, or approach Directors of individual departments.
Councils should seek to further expand the electronic communication of reference information to councillors	<p>All of the reference information listed in the report is available in the Council diary, in specific publications or, where appropriate, on the intranet, except for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - list of local bye laws - available member support services.

Report's recommendations	Current situation
Councils should produce a formal guide to the support services that are available to elected members	This is largely done informally at present, through close contact between members and the Director of Corporate Planning and Members' Support staff.
Councils should seek to provide adequate policy and research information to councillors. Councils should also consider providing councillors with summaries of council/committee decisions. Particular thought should be given to electronic means of communicating this information.	Policy reports are provided to Committees and Working Groups. All members receive the papers for all Committees, and these are put on the intranet after meetings. Summaries of decisions are provided in minutes. There is a section of the intranet devoted to research and information, to which members have access. A daily press cutting service is provided, and newspapers are provided.
Every council should give consideration to introducing a dedicated reference library for members.	Members' Support Unit keeps back issues of magazines, and members can also access material from the library in the Chief Executive's department and other departments, as well as the Council's public libraries. Considerable resources would be required to maintain a dedicated library for members.
Councils should take the necessary measures to ensure that the comfort and personal safety of members undertaking ward surgeries is secured. Specifically, councils should seek to provide appropriate surgery venues and should consider providing members with public liability insurance cover.	<p>In conjunction with Tayside Police, an audit was carried out of all premises used by members for surgeries and advice was given on safety. Members were also offered training on dealing with violent situations and a personal alarm if they wanted one. This advice and training should also be offered to new members.</p> <p>The Council's Public Liability insurance cover extends to include members' surgeries.</p>
<p>Councils should introduce a dual code of conduct for ward surgeries/constituents enquiries. This would relate to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The service constituents could expect from councillors – a standard procedure for dealing with enquires guaranteeing confidentiality and appropriate follow up action. A complaints system should also be established to provide for constituents who are unhappy with the service they receive from councillors. 	<p>No such code of conduct currently in place. In particular:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No formal complaints system, but public would generally contact Chief Executive, parties, MPs/MSPs or press if unhappy

Report's recommendations	Current situation
<p>2. The support that councillors could expect from councils – in particular, councils should consider introducing a system for recording constituent enquiries and logging and tracking members' constituency casework. Particular attention should be given to the potential application of information technology in this process.</p>	<p>2. No formal system for recording and tracking constituent enquiries, although ward files are kept for each member. The present arrangements appear to be largely satisfactory, and there would be considerable staffing implications in establishing a formal tracking system. However, a protocol could be developed to ensure a constituent response from departments to councillors' enquiries</p>
<p>Councils should take a proactive approach to the development of individual training plans for members. This should be based on a regular analysis of areas in which members might benefit from additional information or skills based training.</p>	<p>A survey of members' training needs was carried out in 2000. This resulted in a series of seminars on topical issues, and members were also encouraged to make use of the range of individual courses offered by the IT and Personnel Departments. A number of members expressed an interest in the Professional Development Award, but none have so far followed this through.</p>
<p>Councils should provide an adequate and identified budget for members' training and development</p>	<p>Training/Conference expenses are met from the budget for Members' Allowances and Expenses. Much of the training offered has been delivered 'in-house'.</p>
<p>Councils should ensure that all new members have the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive induction programme that allows them to develop the basic knowledge and skills required to function as a councillor.</p>	<p>Induction for new members to date has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - meetings with all Directors for overview of departmental functions, contacts and key policy issues - training on conduct of quasi-judicial functions - practical issues such as surgery arrangements and expenses.
<p>Councils should consider providing training to all members on their revised political decision-making structures and how it impacts on their roles.</p>	<p>Decision-making structures have not been revised in a way that affects members' roles.</p>
<p>Councils should seek to ensure that all members have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of the key policy issues affecting local government, particularly; local government finance; community planning; and, new local government legislation</p>	<p>A number of in-house seminars have been arranged on topics such as best value, finance, renewing local democracy, ICT and community planning.</p> <p>Members also attend external seminars and conferences on issues of particular interest.</p>

Report's recommendations	Current situation
<p>Councils should demonstrate their commitment to attracting a wider cross-section of the community to stand in local elections, by making more effort to provide for councillors with caring responsibilities. Options include crèches or nursery facilities and a separate allowance for carers.</p>	<p>None of these options are currently available, but the survey of members' support needs could be used to assess any demand for such provision.</p> <p>The Council has streamlined meetings to reduce the amount of time members spend in Committees.</p>
<p>Councils should employ a range of means to notify members about forthcoming training and other support service opportunities</p>	<p>This has largely been done by memos to members, but greater use will be made of e-mail, posters etc to notify and remind members of opportunities.</p>
<p>Councils should undertake formal evaluations of the support services provided to elected members at regular intervals.</p>	<p>The Members' Support Unit survey is carried out annually as mentioned above.</p> <p>A Best Value Review of Members Support was carried out in 1998 and annual updates are given to Committee as part of the Service Planning process.</p>

APPENDIX TWO

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

DRAFT

2003 SURVEY

Please return your completed form in the
'private and confidential' envelope provided

no later than _____

SECTION 1

Satisfaction with services you receive from staff in the Members' Support Unit (please tick one box against each service).

Services	Delighted	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
TYPING					
FILING					
CONSTITUENT ENQUIRIES					
FOLLOWING UP CORRESPONDENCE					
MAKING APPOINTMENTS					
ARRANGING MEETINGS					
TAKING TELEPHONE MESSAGES					
MESSAGE REMINDERS/ PROMPTS					

Have you any specific suggestions to improve the service you receive?

Please make any other comments on the services provided:

SECTION 2

Training and Development

The COSLA/SLGIU report on members' services recommends that Councils should take a proactive approach to the development of individual training plans for members, based on a regular analysis of members' needs for information and skills-based training.

To allow us to organise appropriate seminars, or point you in the direction of suitable courses, please complete the sections below:

1 CURRENT POLICY ISSUES

Please outline any current policy issues on which you think a seminar or briefing would be useful:

2 COUNCIL MANAGEMENT

Please outline any aspects of how the Council operates on which you think a seminar or briefing would be useful:

3 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Please outline any personal skills on which a training course might be useful:

4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

COSLA's Professional Development Award is based on assessing members' knowledge and skills on a number of core and optional units. Core subjects include interpreting financial information, customer care and service user strategies, and initiating and supporting change. Optional subjects include best value, interviewing, developing effectiveness within a group, Europe and developing and monitoring policies on Education and Social Work.

Would you be interested in receiving more information about this award programme?

Yes No

SECTION 3

Support for Carers

A report by COSLA/SLGIU on members' services suggested that Councils should make more effort to provide for councillors with caring responsibilities e.g. by providing crèche facilities or an allowance for carers.

Do you think such provision needs to be made in Dundee? Yes No

Would you personally make use of such provision? Yes No

SECTION 4

Bearing in mind constraints such as limited budgets, are there any additional services which you feel would aid your performance as a councillor?

Thank you

Please write your name below and return this form to Chris Ward, Director of Corporate Planning, no later than _____

NAME _____

All responses will be treated confidentially

APPENDIX THREE

DRAFT PROTOCOL FOR DEALING WITH COUNCILLORS' ENQUIRIES

This guidance is intended to ensure that all departments respond in a consistent way to enquiries from Councillors on behalf of their constituents.

1. **Timescales**

- a response to all Councillors' enquiries must be made within 5 working days.
- ideally, a full response should be given in this timescale. However, if the enquiry is more complicated, a holding response should be made within the 5 days, explaining the action which is being taken to investigate the enquiry and giving an estimated timescale for a full response.
- where a holding response has been given, the aim should be to give a full response within a further 10 working days. Where this is not possible, members should be kept informed of the reasons and given revised timescales.

2. **Use of Telephones, E-mail and Letters**

- while it may sometimes be helpful to discuss enquiries verbally, this can lead to delays if people are unavailable. Exchange of formal letters can also be time consuming in the case of straightforward enquiries.
- Councillors and their support staff will therefore be encouraged to use e-mail, which has the advantages of speed and providing a reliable record of the progress of enquiries. E-mails relating to Councillors' enquiries will be sent as "high" priority, to alert departments to the need for a response within the timescales set out above.
- responses from departments should always be in writing and may be in the form of e-mails or letters depending on the nature and extent of the information concerned. In drafting responses, departments should be aware that Councillors may wish to forward these on to constituents.
- where contact is made by telephone, if Councillors are unavailable then officers should always leave messages with the Members' Support staff.

3. **Contacts**

- through experience, Councillors and their support staff will often have knowledge of the appropriate officers in departments for particular types of enquiry, and may approach them directly rather than through Directors. As long as this works well, it is not intended to impose any formal system for tracking enquiries and monitoring responses.
- Directors should ensure that any officers dealing with Councillors' enquiries are familiar with the procedures in this note, and may wish to establish their own internal procedures in relation to Councillors' enquiries.
- in the absence of a formal monitoring procedure, there will be an onus on Councillors to highlight any failures to deal with enquiries in a satisfactory way, by drawing this to the attention of the Chief Executive.