

STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 26 MAY 2011

COMMUNICATION WITH COUNCILLORS

Report by the County Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Introduction

1. At the meeting of this Committee in March 2010, members agreed that the Council's communications with members of the council should be a priority. The Committee further commented in July 2010 that such communications should be consistent with the protocols agreed by the Council in 2009/10. The Committee wished to ensure that compliance with the protocols was taking place and therefore intended to consider the matter periodically.
2. This report therefore summarises the current position and invites the Committee to consider progress to date. The annex to this report summarises the activity to date.

Background

3. The Council's Constitution contains a Protocol on Members' Rights and Responsibilities. Part 10 of this sets out the principles and expectations for 'Effective communication with members'. The measure of success of such principles will always be feedback from members. For instance, no elected member should hear about a significant issue which directly affects (or will affect) her/his division from a member of the public or the news media.
4. The County Council's Management Team, and Directorate Management Teams, have sought to ensure that commitment to such communications have a higher profile among service managers.

Review

5. Directorates, in 2010, have agreed to implement arrangements to ensure that communications with elected members are a priority and that understanding of these principles is taking place. This has involved:
 - Identifying points of contact in each directorate to oversee local arrangements and to respond to any councillor concerns or queries
 - Briefing relevant staff
 - Maintain the profile through induction for staff

6. Some work remains to be done in further raising the profile of these principles across the council as a consequence of the restructures of some directorates. This has largely led to the cessation of directorate-level newsletters but the opportunity for achieving council-wide messages now is much clearer. In addition, with structural changes and in response to corporate priorities, directorate specific induction briefings have largely given way to corporate induction events. Previously, publicity of the principles for communicating with members was cascaded in part through these means, within directorates; this is now being reviewed to ensure that changes to the structure of the council do not lead to these messages being lessened. There also needs to be a greater focus on reporting performance to the Monitoring Officer.
7. A summary of some actions taken by directorates is included as an Annex to this report.

Councillor perspective

8. A small number of members have raised issues of concern with the Monitoring Officer.
9. The Committee is asked to consider and comment upon members' experience of local communications.

RECOMMENDATION

10. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to comment on communication with elected members and whether any further improvements can be made.**

P G CLARK
County Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Background Papers: Nil

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May 2011

Annex: Effective Communication with Members

Action	Updates				
	CEF	CEO	E&E	F&R	S&CS
Points of contact - with the awareness and sensitivity to oversee the scheme in each Directorate and deal with Member queries/complaints.	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Brief relevant staff and involve them in agreeing what information is significant and appropriate and how it will be shared.	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Include in Directorate inductions.	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Regular reminders through Directorate newsletters/events.	Not so far	Not so far	Not so far	Not so far	Not so far
Report performance quarterly to Monitoring Officer	To be actioned in 2011	To be actioned in 2011	To be actioned in 2011	To be actioned in 2011	To be actioned in 2011