

Report

Democratic Services Committee

Part 1

Date: 26 July 2018

Subject Support for Councillors in their ward work

Purpose To present an outline plan for this review.

Author Head of Democratic Services

Ward All Wards

Summary The Committee has agreed to include this topic on its work programme for 2018-19. The report presents some initial background research, together with an outline plan for reviewing the topic.

Proposal The Committee is asked to consider the background information contained in the report and determine how it wishes to progress its review at this stage.

Action by Head of Democratic Services

Timetable Immediate

Background

This Committee has agreed to review “Support for Councillors in their ward work” as part of its work programme for 2018-19. As stated in the Committee’s annual report:

The Democratic Services team had recently reviewed the guidance for Members on ward meetings. The actual system of ward meeting support for Members was last updated in 2014 and focussed only upon ward meetings, not other ward activity. As few wards hold ward meetings a review was needed of this as well as the general support offered to all Members for ward work. This could also include the issue raised at the Committee’s February meeting, highlighting the need for a protocol regarding enquiries from/about other wards.

The last in-depth research on this area was actually undertaken in 2011, when the old Neighbourhood Committee system was under review, and the Local Service Board was looking at options for partnership engagement. The final report of this review is attached at **Appendix 1**. It was this review which led to the current system of ward meeting support.

While there have been many developments since this review, particularly in technology and the ways people prefer to communicate, many of the themes and issues facing ward-level engagement are still current.

Draft Project Plan

The draft below has been prepared for the Committee to review and agree the plan for this work.

Scope of Review

The previous research on this topic predominantly reviewed the engagement methods themselves, and neighbourhood committees / ward meetings in particular.

It is proposed that, while this project will need to review and update the previous research, the focus should be on the practical support that Councillors need to undertake their ward work effectively, through all the different methods available to them.

Terms of reference

1. Gather and review new sources available since the 2011 paper was produced, including the implications of new legislation such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
2. Consult with Councillors, Officers and the Public on the available methods for engaging with residents.
3. Review the officer support currently in place for ward meetings and other ward work.
4. Develop a toolkit for Councillors to support them in managing their ward responsibilities effectively.

Methodology

1. Desk-based research

Purpose: to update the 2011 research paper, including a review of

- developments in engagement methods e.g. the use of social media;
- best practice and benchmarking with other authorities;
- new legislation e.g. Wellbeing of Future Generations; and
- new local policies, plans and strategies affecting this area.

2. **Questionnaire to councillors and senior officers**

Purpose: To gather feedback on the options available for engagement and contact with / by local residents.

Method: To be conducted via face-to-face interviews where possible. Otherwise through written responses.

3. **Interviews with key contacts**

In addition to the questionnaires to all councillors and senior officers, it is proposed that interviews take place with:

- Policy, Partnership and Involvement Team
 - How does ward activity link in with wider consultation and engagement activity by the Council and its partners?
 - Are there implications for councillors in new legislative requirements such as future generations, welsh language and equalities?
 - What corporate support and guidance could be made available to, or adapted for councillors' use?
- Newport Intelligence Hub
 - What intelligence is held corporately that could support councillors in their ward work? e.g. ward profiles – are councillors making the most of these?
- Organisational Development Team
 - What corporate training and support is available that could be made available to, or adapted for Councillors? E.g. generic training on case work management, information technology and security, health and safety issues such as long working etc.
- Digital Services
 - How can councillors make the best use of the technology available to them?
 - What guidance is / should be in place for information security and data protection in relation to ward work?
- Customer Services
 - What channels are available to councillors in managing ward enquiries and complaints?
 - How could councillors and customer services work together more effectively?

4. **Public consultation**

Purpose: to invite the views of the public on their preferences for communicating with their local representatives.

Methods: online survey; press release; citizens panel (if timings allow); promotion through consultation networks and community groups.

Timescales

To complete the consultation activity and report back to the Committee's meeting on 8 November 2018.

Financial Summary

This report is part of an ongoing review by the Committee, which is being funded from within existing resources. Financial and resource implications will need to be taken into account in drafting any recommendations, and these will need to be identified in the final report.

Risks

This report is part of an ongoing review by the Committee. The final report will need to identify and address the risks arising from the findings and recommendations.

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Effective public engagement is a key priority for the Council, underpinning the Corporate Plan and other major policies. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act also places huge emphasis on the importance of public involvement and engagement in all areas of our business. This review will need to take into account the wider engagement activity of the Council, and how the work of Councillors both contributes to and can draw from wider intelligence gathering by the Council and its partners.

Proposal

The Committee is asked to consider the background information contained in the report and determine how it wishes to progress its review at this stage.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

To follow

Comments of Monitoring Officer

To follow

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

To follow

Local issues

This review will impact on all wards so all ward members will be provided with the opportunity to contribute to the review.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

The review will need to consider the implications of the Equalities Act in relation to ward activity, to ensure that any mechanisms proposed do not directly or indirectly exclude or discriminate against protected groups.

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

The review will need to consider any implications of the Measure in relation to ward activity.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Act represents a fundamental change in the legal framework since this topic was last reviewed fully in 2012. The review will need to take into consideration the new requirements of the Act, and how the principles of the legislation can be embedded within any new guidance or processes.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

The review will need to consider any implications of the Act in relation to ward activity.

Background Papers

Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Forum for Learning, Caring and Leisure; “Engaging with the Public”, 2011.

Dated: July 2018