

## Members Advisory Panel

A meeting of the Members Advisory Panel was held on Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

**Present:** Councillor Coleman (Chairman) Councillors Mrs Beaumont, Mrs Cains, Mrs Fletcher, Gibson, Lupton and Mrs Rigg.

**Officers:** D E Bond, N.Hart, Mrs M.Waggott (LD).C.Willows (DNS).

**Apologies for absence** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cook, Kirton, Narroway, Mrs Nelson and Walmsley.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2007 were agreed as a correct record.

### Customer First Stage 2 and Customer Service Standards

Members views were invited on the draft Customer First Stage Two Programme and the revised Customer Service Standards; which were to be launched across the Council in June 2007.

The Customer First programme was a self assessment programme, which allowed all Services across the Council to compare what they do, in terms of customer service, to individual criteria which are contained within the Programme. The criteria within the programme had been developed using best practice from across the customer service sector, including advice from the Institute of Customer Services as well as other quality awards such as Charter Mark. It was noted that the criteria was relevant to all services, regardless of whether they were front-facing or were a back office 'support service' as customers could be anybody including residents, businesses, visitors, Elected Members or internal colleagues.

Following the launch of the programme in 2003/4, almost 30 Services had achieved compliance with stage one of the programme and arrangements were in place to work with all of the remaining services who had yet to complete the programme.

Stage two had now been produced with the aim of moving Services on from providing a 'good' level of customer service to one that provides 'excellent' level of customer service. It was anticipated that each service who participated in the programme would establish a small working group to work through the programme; participants being representative of the range of staff within that service to ensure that the whole team was able to engage with the process and contribute to the completion of the programme. The length of time that it would take to complete stage two would vary, depending on how well each service currently dealt with customers service, although it was expected that it would take around 3-6 months to reach the standard.

At the same time, a new set of customer service standards had been produced which covered principal targets and standards which customers can expect when making contact with the Council to request a service. It was proposed that a booklet be made available to all staff, so that they were

aware of the standards expected of them. A shorter version, in A4 3-fold leaflet format, would be made available to customers and distributed across the range of service points / linked to the website.

Drop in sessions for Members had been arranged for Members to input their views into the process on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2007 and Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007. Reference was made to a number of issues regarding customer service standards, such as the use of hunt groups for telephone calls; the reasonable use of voice mail; appropriate display of identity badges; corporate uniform for staff dealing with customers; use of service messages whilst on hold and the recognition of some cultures being able to speak, but not read English. These issues would be taken forward as part of members input to Customer First Stage 2 and Customer Service Standards.

AGREED that:-

1. The report be noted.
2. Members comments regarding both documents be incorporated as part of the consultation process.

### **Member Support and Development Programme 2007/2008**

Consideration was given to the content of the Members Support and Development Programme for 2007/8, which had been developed to supplement the aims of the Members Learning and Development Strategy in enhancing member development and providing sufficient support resources necessary for Members to be able to carry out their various roles.

The Programme had been developed to compliment the "Guide to Member Roles" produced by Democratic Services, which identified relevant skill requirements for all member roles. Learning opportunities would be provided through access to the Council's own 'in-house' training and development resources and would be supplemented by appropriate external member learning resources, such as those provided by the North East Employers Organisation, Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government, IDeA etc. Funding would be provided via the Council's dedicated budget for Member Learning.

The Programme would be delivered once Members had identified their necessary support requirements during their PSP session; and following confirmation of their roles on various Council Committees and outside body organisations. In addition learning and development opportunities would also be developed to address specific circumstances, e.g. new legislation, or service specific training such as that provided during Stage 2 of the Members Induction Programme for Members serving on Planning, Licensing, Employee Appeals or Appointment Committees.

Members requested that, where possible, the Programme include reference to the duration of the courses/ length of programme; and that it be recognised by the Programme that whilst a basic level of skills would be required across the board by all councillors; a higher degree of knowledge in some areas would be required by Cabinet Members; Chairmen and Vice Chairmen etc..

AGREED that the proposed Member Support and Development Programme for 2007/2008 be noted.

### **Members Handbook-Proposed Draft Content**

Further to the meeting of the Panel held on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2007, when members of the Panel approved the broad framework for the content of a new Members Handbook for publication in readiness for the next Municipal Year, members were invited to comment on the suitability of the draft content as an information resource for all members; and to consider the future options available regarding the presentation of diary and year book information to members.

With regard to the content, it was suggested that the font type of the document be increased so as to be more easily read. With regard to support for members generally, it was requested that future consideration be given to the protocol regarding identification of members deemed to be in most need of mobile blackberry devices. It was also noted that DSE assessments would be carried out for all members by the Council's Back Care specialist regarding the safe use of IT equipment within their own homes.

Members were also asked to consider the future provision of hard copy diaries for all members given the recent prevalence towards 'electronic diaries' and the reported cost of producing 'in house' hard copy diaries. It was suggested that members be asked their future preference in this regard; and that only those that express a preference for retaining a hard copy diary, continue to be provided with one. These diaries could be obtained direct from the Council's preferred supplier at a reasonable cost in comparison to in house production.

Consideration was also given to the wealth of information which was previously only provided within a Members Year Book; but which was now commonly available from a variety of other sources; such as the Council's Internet and Intranet sites, the Council's Cisco telephone directory and the comprehensive Members Handbook document referred above. The cost and time factors involved in reproducing this information further in hard copy was also noted. It was suggested that members would continue to find it useful to have to hand a condensed year book document containing the following information:-

- Councillor Contact Details, including political status and ward representation;
- Committee Membership

AGREED that:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. The content of the draft Members Handbook be approved and CD Rom copies of the Handbook be made available to all elected members post elections, with a hard copy being provided for each co-opted member and a copy placed in the office based Members Library facility.

3. All Members be invited to comment on their future requirements regarding the provision of hard copy diaries versus a preference for maintaining an electronic diary; and procurement of an appropriate number be undertaken with the Council's preferred supplier.
4. Further to the accessibility of the information by electronic and other means; as well as other advantages referred to including the likely financial savings and the ability to keep information more up to date, a condensed Members Year Book be provided to all Members post elections containing the following information only:-
  - Councillor Contact Details, including political status and ward representation;
  - Committee Membership

### **Ethical Governance Audit-IDeA Light Touch Health Check**

Consideration was given to a report that provided Members with an opportunity to comment on the proposed action plans arising from the Ethical Governance Audit and IDeA Light Touch Health Check.

The surveys were carried out in November 2006 and the Health Check was undertaken in December last year.

Members were provided with copies of draft action plans for each of the three surveys and an action plan specific to the Light Touch Health Check. Subject to any views by this Panel, Cabinet would consider the action plans with a view to agreeing whether they should be implemented in the new municipal year (subject to Council confirmation).

When implementing the agreed action plans, reports would be taken back to this Panel, the Standards Committee and other relevant Committees (eg Planning, Select Committees) for consideration of, and views on particular elements of the plans. It was noted that it may also be necessary to report back to Cabinet and Council if key constitutional changes were proposed.

AGREED that the content of the proposed action plans be approved.

### **Consultative Forums within the Democratic Structure:- -Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum-Proposed Amalgamation -Members Advisory Panel-Reporting Mechanism**

Consideration was given to a report :-

- presenting members with details of a proposal to amend the existing consultation arrangements regarding older persons; that would have a consequent affect on the future of the Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum in an effort to streamline and provide a more co-ordinated approach to consultation with older persons;
- proposing to members that minutes of the Members Advisory Panel be reported to Council for information/receipt.

The Council's current arrangements for the structure and reporting of the proceedings of its various consultative groups was agreed by Cabinet on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2000 and included the following groups:-

- Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum
- Parish Council Liaison Forum
- Housing Forum
- Homelessness Advisory Forum
- Local Joint Consultative Panel
- Teachers Joint Consultative Panel

Since that time, the Members Advisory Panel has been established with the specific aim of monitoring how the Council's Constitution was implemented, enhancing support services to assist member development, and to act as a forum for receiving member input to policy development.

The purpose of the Council's Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum was to 'discuss and consider issues of joint interest between the local authority and elder citizens of the Borough'. Membership of the Forum currently consisted of both elected members (7) and representatives from organisations such as Age Concern, Teesside Pensioners, St John's Living Well, University of the Third Age, TGWU Retired Members Association and Stockton Residents & Community Groups Association. In addition to this Forum, a Senior Citizens Forum had also been administered since August 2000 by the Head of Adult Operations (CESC) and was set up as a consultative older person's forum by Social Services. Membership of this group also includes an elected member, as well as representatives from the TGWU Retired Members, St John's Living Well and other elderly persons representatives.

Consultation with older persons had also been carried out by the Independent Living Group since June 2006 through administration carried out by the Independent Living Team within CESC. The Group consisted of an elected member representative as well as members from the voluntary sector, the Carers Centre, social care and acute sector representation as well as having work programme links with both the Council, North Tees Primary Care Trust, Hartlepool & North Tees Acute Trust, Integrated Mental Health Services and the Ambulance Service.

As a consequence of the presence of each of the above groups, there was an obvious duplication in both purpose, and in some cases, representation on each group, with the result that the identity of an appropriate forum for consultation with older persons was diminished as a result of the duplication and the lack of clarity over respective areas of responsibility.

Therefore, it was proposed by the officers involved in the administration of each group, including the Head of Adult Operations, the Strategic Commissioner for Independent Living and the Team Leader –Democratic & Development Services, that options for streamlining the current arrangements be considered; with a view to having a single and more effective system for consultation with older people's groups in the Borough. The proposal arising from these discussions was for an Older Person's Consultation Group to be formed consisting of members drawn from each of the three groups, with the following specific purpose, to:-

- Improve the quality of life for Older People
  - Enable Older People to participate in discussions as active citizens
  - Provide opportunities to consult on a wide range of issues affecting older people within the Borough (including issues of health care and support, transport, leisure and education)
  - Make recommendations to the Independent Living Steering Group on issues affecting Older People
  - Comment on any major service development decisions that significantly effect older people
  - Receive reports on issues affecting Older People
  - Help identify issues of interest and concern to Older People
- Monitor progress against strategic plans for change affecting Older People.

A draft terms of reference for the Group was submitted, including a diagram of how the group would link with the various formal decision making bodies. A proposed membership was also suggested, which would seek to provide five elected members on the Group. Administration of the Group would be carried out by officers from the Independent Living Team, with meetings being held on a monthly basis:-

The proposed merger of the existing elderly persons consultative groups would see the cessation of the Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum and therefore discussion on the principle of this proposal has been held with the Chairman of the Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum, who was also represented on the Senior Citizens Forum. The Chairman was in agreement with the proposals and considered that they achieved the more effective administration of consultation with older persons, and avoided some of the duplication of representation and administration present within the current arrangements. These proposals had also now been formally approved by the Independent Living Group, the Senior Citizens Forum and by the Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum at its meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

Members of this Panel expressed support for the principle of the proposal, but suggested that the proposed new Older People Consultation Group would need to review its membership to be more manageable, whilst still being inclusive to interested representatives.

With regard to the Members Advisory Panel, it was noted that there had been no reporting mechanism put in place for minutes of meetings of the Members Advisory Panel, other than those minutes being reported back to the next meeting of the Panel. This therefore potentially restricted other members access to the agenda, reports and minutes of the Panel, other than by accessing them on the Council's E-Genda system.

It was therefore proposed that, in accordance with the reporting mechanism for the other consultative groups of the Council, the minutes of meetings of the Panel be reported to Council for information following their ratification by the Panel.

AGREED that:-

1. That the report be noted.

2. The views of the Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum regarding the proposed amendment to the existing consultation arrangements with older persons be noted.
3. This Panel approve the principle of the proposed amalgamation of groups currently operating independently as part of consultation arrangements regarding older persons (as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report) subject to the concerns expressed regarding the need to review the proposed membership of the new Older People Consultation Group; and that the new arrangements be put in place for the 2007/2008 Municipal Year.
4. In accordance with the reporting mechanism for the other consultative groups of the Council, the minutes of meetings of the Members Advisory Panel be reported to Council for information following their ratification by the Panel.