
Report to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

9 February 2005

Report of
Head of Corporate Policy

Title

Best Value and Scrutiny Reviews - Supporting Democracy

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report updates you on the progress on the Best Value Review of Supporting Democracy.

2 Recommendation

2.1 You are recommended to note the report.

3 Information/Background

3.1 The Best Value review of Supporting Democracy was presented to the former Scrutiny Board 4 on 24 March 2004 and Cabinet on 30 March 2004. Cabinet considered that a number of recommendations would require additional funding and decided that these should be considered, where necessary, as part of the PPR process.

3.2 In the meantime work has continued to implement other recommendations if this could be done independently of other recommendations, resources were available and no policy decisions were required. Appendix 1 shows the progress made.

4 Proposal and Other Option(s) to be Considered

4.1 You are asked to note the report.

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location

None

Action Plan

Ref	Recommendations	Action required	Lead Officer	Progress or plans for future action
1	New written guidance to be provided for Members serving on outside bodies	Supplement the existing guidance to include more details about representatives' responsibilities to the City Council when serving on outside bodies	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	This is on-going
2	Support officers to be nominated for all organisations. Briefings/debriefings should be held before and after each meeting of the organisation	List of organisations to be supplied to Management Board for Directors to nominate support officers for all outside bodies	Director of Legal and Democratic Services to provide list. Each Director to nominate a support officer for each organisation. Support Officers to organise briefings and debriefings	Support is provided as necessary to Members participating in the work of key organisations.
3	Better induction needed from both the council and organisation concerned	Nominated Support Officers to ensure that induction is provided for new representatives on outside Bodies and to request the organisations concerned to provide induction as well.	Nominated Support Officers	See 2 above
4	More detailed information should be provided about the role, purpose and meeting arrangements for outside bodies to assist Groups in making their nominations	Produce briefing note outlining the purpose of the organisation, where, when and how often they meet.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	We now include a column on the report that goes to the Annual Meeting setting out the purpose of the organisation and the frequency of meetings
5	Regular written reports to be provided to the appropriate Scrutiny Board on the work of key organisations	Scrutiny Boards to determine which organisations they wish to receive reports about. Support Officers to assist Members in producing reports.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services to support Scrutiny Boards in determining organisations where reports are required. Nominated support officers to produce reports	A report is going to Cabinet on 8 March 2005 proposing a system of reporting to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

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6	Robust annual review of the value of membership of outside bodies	Report on the importance and benefits of representation to be produced annually for each organisation. Political Groups to undertake skills analysis to assess appropriate representation.	Appointed representatives/ nominated support officers. Political Groups	See above. When receiving a report on the work of the outside body Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee will consider the value of the appointment and make a recommendation to the Annual Meeting.
7	Reduce unnecessary officer attendance at Cabinet meetings	Develop protocol for officer attendance, balancing the need to provide significant information immediately in order to assist the decision making process, while recognising that factual queries may be answered more effectively in other ways. Investigate better ways e.g. text messaging to notify officers shortly before their items are due to be called.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	Individual Directors assess how many support officers they need at meetings.
8	Improve the quality and intelligibility of written reports to Cabinet and other meetings	Produce a shorter, simpler report template, using plain English. Produce guidance/provide training for officers	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	Report writing is now part of the Corporate Training Programme. The template has not been revised as this is not, in itself, seen as the main issue.
9	Improve the Forward Plan, linking it more closely with service planning	Produce guidance on the purpose and roles for use by officers and Members. Ensure Scrutiny make effective use of the Plan for work planning. Ensure Forward Plan is made available for public to access e.g. in <i>Contact</i> , on the website etc.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	Presentation of the Forward Plan has been improved and it is intended to make it available soon on the Council's website. The Management Board are working on improving the content of the Plan
10	Scrutiny to base their main work programmes on the Forward Plan and to consider the issues selected from the Forward Plan before formal decisions are made	Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee to consider draft protocol attached to this report Scrutiny Boards to adopt protocol from new municipal year.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	This can be progressed when more work has been done on the content of the Forward Plan (see 9 above)

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11	Develop common criteria for deciding other review topics	Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee to consider draft checklist attached to this report. Scrutiny Boards to use checklist from new municipal year.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee has approved the criteria, which will be used by Scrutiny Boards as necessary
12	Improve systems for monitoring what happens to decisions made by the Council and to recommendations made by Scrutiny and evaluating how effective they have been	Develop "tracking" document for recommendations (including review at appropriate time after implementation of recommendations)	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	An "outstanding minutes" report goes to all meetings. Decisions made at full Council are referred to the appropriate Directorate or Government Department. On recommendations from Scrutiny there is a tracking document agreed by SCRUCO to be used by Scrutiny Boards.
13	Increase public involvement in the scrutiny process	Produce protocol for public involvement Produce public information leaflet (see action point 17) Publicise meetings/agendas more widely Involve public wherever relevant when carrying out scrutiny reviews. Seek feedback from public attending meetings	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	Deferred pending a decision on item 22. However, in the meantime, Scrutiny Boards are making efforts to involve the public in their work.
14	Continue to encourage voter registration, concentrating on the lowest response areas	Monitor lowest response areas. Use publicity as necessary/appropriate	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	The lowest response polling districts were the only areas where a "door knocking" exercise was undertaken. This produced mixed results, but an overall increase in responses of 2.84% in the areas canvassed against an overall city wide decline in response of 4.74%.

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15	Undertake analysis of benchmarking data relating to elections service	Contact benchmarking comparators to establish reason for differences. Undertake further benchmarking using the Electoral Commission online benchmarking facility Present report on findings to Scrutiny Board 4	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	The data for the benchmarking exercise depended on statistics following the 2004 household survey and the publication of the register in December 2004. The report will be taken to Scrutiny Board 1 when the work has been completed.
16	Increase young people's participation in local democracy and in the development and delivery of services which affect them	Continue to support school and youth councils and other appropriate projects Develop youth section on Council website	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Director of Education & Libraries Communication & Media Relations Manager	There has been continued work throughout the year with the Democracy project. More work with young people is being formulated as part of the Equality Impact Assessment and will be incorporated into the Legal & Democratic Services Operational Plan for 2005/06 A number of areas on the council's website provide information for young people although there are no plans at present to develop a young people's area of the website.
17	Produce an attractive leaflet about "How the Council works," including information about how decisions are taken and how to become a councillor.	Identify issues for inclusion Compare with other good practice examples Seek public feedback/opinion	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Communication & Media Relations Manager	Deferred pending a decision on item 22
18	Chairs to welcome public at all meetings and explain procedure as meeting progresses, including why some issues are discussed in private. Speakers at meetings to say who they are.	Provide guidance and training to Members chairing meetings.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	This has generally been deferred pending a decision on item 22. However, at Planning Committee we have developed a procedure for welcoming the public and explaining to them the process of the meeting. This was piloted on 27 January 2005.

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19	Collect data about public attendance at meetings for future comparison	Undertake survey/issue questionnaire to public at meetings	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	Some data collection has taken place. This confirmed the situation that, at present, members of the public only attend for specific items.
20	Publicise when debates and decisions on interesting items will take place	Identify important key issues/decisions and make better use of the Internet and statutory Forward Plan to make public aware of them	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Communication & Media Relations Manager	Deferred pending a decision on item 22
21	Hold Cabinet Question & Answer sessions in community venues	Programme a series of sessions, one per quarter. Ensure that they are well publicised, including arrangements for submitting questions	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Communication & Media Relations Manager	Deferred pending a decision on item 22
22	Pilot a public question time at Council and Cabinet meetings from June 2004.	Develop protocol for public question time. Identify best method(s) of communication to encourage public participation and awareness. Seek feedback from public attending meetings. Amend format of Council agenda to permit time for questions from the public	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Communication & Media Relations Manager	A proposed protocol was considered by the Constitution Working Group on 8 December 2004. Members are currently consulting with their political groups and, at the time of writing this report, are expected to give further consideration to this issue at their meeting on 3 February 2005.
23	Consult on interest in webcasting council meetings	Questions were included in Citizens Panel survey in December 2003.	Head of Corporate Policy	The results are shown in Appendix 2 to this report and were included in the report to Cabinet in March 2004.
24	Review Consultation Strategy	Establish how effective current Strategy is and make changes as appropriate. Ensure Strategy is linked to corporate planning process.	Head of Corporate Policy	A review of existing approaches to consultation has been completed. External consultants are currently reviewing our overall approach to the collection and use of data and other information.

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25	Restructure Area Forums with more local meetings	Consult with Area Forum working Group on proposals shown in Appendix 5. Seek Cabinet approval for recommended changes to current arrangements.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	The Chief Executive circulated draft proposals for consultation in December 2004. The Head of Area Co-ordination has spoken at all the January Area Forums as part of the consultation on possible changes to Area Forum.
26	Improve buddying system for new councillors	Continue training for Councillor mentors (acknowledging that the Conservative Group have their own practice of arranging mentoring). Continue having an employee nominated by the Legal & Democratic Services Directorate as a mentor for all new Councillors	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Head of Human Resources	On-going
27	Request political groups to consider introducing a shadowing scheme for aspiring councillors	Political groups to consider. Develop protocol for operation of scheme if groups wish to pursue	Political Groups Director of Legal and Democratic Services	This has not yet been pursued.
28	Collect data about public knowledge of local councillors for future comparison	Monitor knowledge about councillors in Citizens Panel questionnaire	Head of Corporate Policy	The results are shown in Appendix 2 to this report and were included in the report to Cabinet in March 2004.
29	Provide more accessible information about Members on the council website	Use other authority good practice examples (identified as part of the review research) to improve website	Communication & Media Relations Manager	The council's new website, which was re-launched in 2004, includes a complete section on the "Council & Democracy". This includes information about individual councillors, Cabinet portfolios and their strategic plans, the decision making and scrutiny processes.

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30	Monitor progress on the use of individual Member's websites elsewhere	Keep up to date on the developments on the LGA e-Democracy project 'CouncillorSite'. Review progress on independent websites.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	The LGA and Poptel Technology are currently running a pilot project with 10 Councils (Alnwick DC, Castle Morpeth BC, Corby BC, Hastings BC, Lancashire CC, Leicester City Council, LB Lewisham, Middlesborough, Ryedale DC, Sandwell MBC, Wirral BC), involving up to 600 Councillors, in their councillor.info site. Feedback on the progress of the pilot project is due in Summer 2005.
31	Produce job descriptions and list of key skills for councillors to guide training programme	Produce draft job descriptions using good practice examples from other authorities (see Appendix 7 for examples) Refer to Cabinet Member (Service Performance and Support) and Supporting Members Advisory Panel for inclusion within Personal Development Diaries. Provide necessary training to enable members to be able to fulfil their job descriptions	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Head of Human Resources	The Supporting Members Advisory Panel have asked for some work to be done on this and will have a report to a future meeting.
32	Expand Members' Handbook to produce one guide to the services available to Members from all Directorates	Co-ordinate information from all Directorates	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	The Handbook now includes a brief description of the Directorates and includes the A-Z of Services.
33	Review the provision of secretarial support/ diary management for all members and the times when the service is required	Survey Members to ascertain individual requirements	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Members Support	This has not been taken forward as it would need additional resources.

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34	Improve accommodation and facilities for Members	Review of Council House Accommodation	Cabinet Member (Service Performance and Support)	Proposals to improve accommodation proposals have been discussed with the relevant Cabinet Member. The plan we are working to is to begin releasing accommodation in the Council House in the late summer this year, with more moves planned for 06/07, subject to PPR decisions.
35	Issue meetings calendar electronically and in different hard copy formats	Investigate ways of producing calendar electronically, possibly through Outlook. Review format of diary	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	This was discussed with the former IT contractor and will be discussed again with IT Net when preparing the calendar for the forthcoming year.
36	Provide guidance on the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act	Arrange Member Data Protection and Freedom of Information training.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Head of Human Resources	Training has taken place and is included in the Development Programme
37	Provide flexible, tailored IT training at times to suit Members	Identify training needs and opportunities (e.g. open learning and modular training – bite size) to fulfil those needs.	Director of Legal and Democratic Services Head of Human Resources	Members are offered a variety of IT training and further training is being provided through the Members Empowered Project.

Citizens' Panel Survey results

A Citizen's Panel survey in December 2003 asked people about their contact with the council. The results are shown in the tables below.

1 Recognition of local councillors

Can you remember the name of one or more of your ward councillors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	509	52.2	52.6	52.6
	no	458	47.0	47.4	100.0
	Total	967	99.2	100.0	
Missing	no response	8	.8		
Total		975	100.0		

2 Contact with councillors

Has a councillor ever consulted you for your views

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	119	12.2	12.3	12.3
	no	812	83.3	84.0	96.3
	Dont know	36	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	967	99.2	100.0	
Missing	no response	8	.8		
Total		975	100.0		

Have you ever made contact with a councillor for help/advice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	238	24.4	24.8	24.8
	no	723	74.2	75.2	100.0
	Total	961	98.6	100.0	
Missing	no response	14	1.4		
Total		975	100.0		

3 Area Forums

Awareness/attendance of/at Area Forums

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	attended Area Forum	53	5.4	5.5	5.5
	Aware of but not attended	257	26.4	26.8	32.3
	Not aware but would have attended	347	35.6	36.1	68.4
	Not aware would not have attended	303	31.1	31.6	100.0
	Total	960	98.5	100.0	
Missing	no response	15	1.5		
Total		975	100.0		

4 Other public meetings

Awareness/attendance at public meetings

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	attended meeting	46	4.7	4.8	4.8
	Aware of but not attended	259	26.6	27.1	31.9
	Not aware but would have attended	337	34.6	35.2	67.1
	Not aware would not have attended	315	32.3	32.9	100.0
	Total	957	98.2	100.0	
Missing	no response	18	1.8		
Total		975	100.0		

5 Webcasting of Council meetings

Interest in watching live broadcasts

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, would definitely watch	334	34.3	34.8	34.8
	Good idea but do not have time to watch	340	34.9	35.4	70.1
	I would prefer to attend the meeting	92	9.4	9.6	79.7
	No, i am not interested	195	20.0	20.3	100.0
	Total	961	98.6	100.0	
Missing	no response	14	1.4		
Total		975	100.0		

6 Use of e-mail for consultation

Interested in Council consultation by email or text

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	409	41.9	42.4	42.4
	Interested but do not have email/text	274	28.1	28.4	70.8
	not interested	282	28.9	29.2	100.0
	Total	965	99.0	100.0	
Missing	no response	10	1.0		
Total		975	100.0		

7 Use of Council website

Do you access Council's web-site

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	264	27.1	27.5	27.5
	no	696	71.4	72.5	100.0
	Total	960	98.5	100.0	
Missing	no response	15	1.5		
Total		975	100.0		

Would you use web-site to be consulted on key decisions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	459	47.1	48.3	48.3
	Interested but have no access to internet	339	34.8	35.7	84.0
	Not interested	152	15.6	16.0	100.0
	Total	950	97.4	100.0	
Missing	no response	25	2.6		
Total		975	100.0		