

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR CUSTOMERS, GOVERNANCE AND
EMPLOYEES****MEMBER COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME****Purpose of the Report**

1. To set out and seek approval to a cross cutting programme of work designed to improve the nature, content and timeliness of communications with and information for elected members and ensure that they are effectively supported in the performance of their roles and responsibilities.

Information

2. Feedback has been received from a variety of elected members about the type of information they receive, its timeliness and the channels by which it is communicated to them. Members have suggested the need for greater two-way communication and dialogue. Discussions with members have also highlighted the need for greater clarity and consistency in responding to complaints and issues raised by members and the need for a more holistic view of issues impacting on residents across the Council. Following recent Data Protection training several members have raised issues about the support they receive and the tools they have to manage information and respond to constituents in the increasingly complex and sensitive arena in which they operate. It is intended to pull together work to respond to these inter-related issues into one co-ordinated approach to avoid duplication, maximise the benefits derived from work already underway and any additional activities identified across the whole Council and all elected members.
3. It is therefore proposed to establish a new cross cutting programme of work to review the Council's approach to member communication and engagement and consider where improvements can be made. The lead member for this work will be the Chairman of Governance and Ethics Committee, supported by the Service Director for Customers, Governance and Employees and Monitoring Officer as the lead officer.

Proposed programme of work.

4. A suggested high-level scope for the programme of work is attached as Appendix A.
5. The work programme is broadly set out as 4 separate workstreams including:

- a. Communication with Members
 - b. Handling members' queries and complaints
 - c. Support for members
 - d. Members' training and development
6. The workstream on **Communication with members** relates to key lines of information, such as highways queries which account for a large proportion of all member queries by volume. It is recognised that elected members require proactive, timely and accurate information about the highway network as it affects their ward areas. It is therefore important that the provision of this information is adequate for those purposes and provided in a consistent way whilst ensuring that there are clear and consistent channels for members to raise concerns and have specific queries answered such as through the dedicated email address for members highways queries which has recently been established. A medium-term goal is to have an automated system or integration with the MyNotts App which is under development. Through such a system it is hoped that members would be able to access up to the minute information about highways in any given area through NCC mobile devices.
 7. This workstream will involve gathering information from a range of stakeholders to understand needs, what currently works and what could be done better as well as looking at best practice from elsewhere. Some "quick wins" may be possible such as developing a monthly briefing for members of key lines of information which they would find helpful, all in one place. Other objectives would include having consistent approaches to the provision of information regardless of which Department is involved as well as improved pages for members' information on the Intranet. Where possible, opportunities will be identified to automate and optimise relevant information to members from source to maximise efficiency. Critical to this strand of work is the need to ensure that the Council's arm's length organisations such as Via, Arc and Inspire are part of the implementation of any improvements developed.
 8. The **Queries and complaints workstream** is about ensuring that the Council adopts a consistent approach to handling such issues. This will require a diagnostic approach to understand current practice and what works best and then applying standards to those procedures for the future, along the lines of the customer service standards. Early wins in this area are likely to include a key contacts list for members so that queries are efficiently routed; wider application of current best practice and customer service standards with clear routes for escalation. Medium term goals should ensure that the Council's handling of queries from MPs is aligned with the process for members so that time and effort is not duplicated and to enable the Council to have a high-level overview of issues. This strand of work will incorporate a review of the Council's Corporate Complaints procedure.
 9. The **Support for members workstream** will focus on physical, technology and officer support for members to perform their roles and will ensure greater clarity around the telephony and mobile ICT offer to members, home and work office storage requirements and in the medium to longer term a solution to support members with their constituency casework. This will again involve looking at what members' needs are as well as drawing on affordable best practice from elsewhere. This workstream will also consider the advice and support provided to members from within the Democratic Services team.
 10. **Training and development** will involve the creation of a comprehensive rolling programme of training and development for members starting from their point of induction to the Council. This will need to recognise the different levels of experience members will have regarding their

roles as elected members and the numbers of different functional roles Councillors undertake. It is proposed to undertake a training needs analysis working with individual members and political groups to ensure that the programme can be matched against the needs of members, their roles and aligned to the available resources. It is also proposed to provide additional training in respect of key cross cutting issues such as the effective use of social media, personal safety and member conduct. Some of this training is already under development for delivery over the Autumn.

11. There are a variety of cross cutting themes/issues which will apply to all workstreams such as the need to engage with a broad cross section of members to better understand their needs, to obtain baseline information and ensure that new approaches are inclusive and flexible enough to meet the needs of a wide range of members. Officer training and data protection issues will arise in all workstreams as will the need for greater consistency and approach to escalation where issues have become stalled and need unblocking.
12. A standard programme approach will be adopted with a series of quick wins identified and implemented at an early stage. Beyond this, issues will be developed and addressed on an incremental basis according to members' identified priorities and available resources. Concurrently, officers will embark on a discovery phase and then develop greater detail for Committee to consider, along with any resource and associated financial implications. Early activity in the work of the programme will also include developing a Communication Plan to involve members, the Council's internal Departments and the Council's Highways delivery partner, Via and other arm's length organisations including Arc and Inspire.
13. Oversight of the programme will be through this Committee which under the leadership of the Chairman has a good track record of effective collaborative cross party working. It is proposed that a blended approach is taken to seeking the views of and involving members in the work of the programme. Some work will be undertaken directly through the Committee, other activities may be best delivered through engagement with group leaders and their political groups and other issues may require engagement with all 66 members of the Council and their support staff to ensure that what is developed properly meets members' needs to effectively perform their roles.
14. The Service Director Customers, Governance and Employees and Monitoring Officer will lead the officer group working on the programme which will be drawn from a range of areas relevant to the cross-cutting themes involved. It is proposed that programme updates be brought to this Committee on a quarterly basis.
15. There are clearly interdependencies between the work of this programme and other work underway. One example is the Council's cross-cutting programme "Enhancing customer experience through Digital Development" as any new approaches identified will need to maximise the use of technology and automated responses to ensure increased efficiency and value for money. One of the early deliveries from this programme is the implementation of the MyNotts App which could be expanded to include access to information for members. There are also potential synergies between the work of the "Member communication and engagement" programme and the review of the Council's Constitution which is currently underway in relation to communication and support for elected members. Other long-standing programmes of work such as the migration to the Cloud and Information Governance Improvement Programme are also relevant.

Other Options Considered

16. It would be possible to maintain the status quo but that is unlikely to address the issues raised by members.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

17. Members have expressed clear views that the nature and manner of information and communications with them could be improved and this programme is the proposed response to those concerns.

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

19. The programme and outcomes will be designed to comply with current Data protection requirements.

Financial Implications

20. The programme will require a broad range of resources to be applied and may require some additional resources in some areas. It is envisaged that a reasonable proportion of the work should be capable of being contained within current resources but work on longer term objectives such as the development of systems may require dedicated resources. During the discovery phase further clarity about the scope and resources required will emerge and further detail on the overall resources required will be reported at a later stage. Given the wide-ranging nature of the programme with multiple streams and cross council working, it is proposed that a project manager be assigned to maintain focus on programme timelines and deliverables.

Human Resources Implications

21. At this stage no, additional staffing resources have been identified but this will be kept under review and further information provided as necessary in future reports.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

22. The programme will aim to incorporate any equalities implications for current or future elected members so that they can be embedded into systems and procedures where relevant.

Smarter Working Implications

23. The programme will be designed to build upon and be consistent with the Council's smarter working objectives.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

24. When delivering the programme objectives, the systems and procedures developed will have regard to all members' responsibilities regarding corporate parenting and safeguarding.

Implications for Service Users

25. By ensuring that members have access to appropriate support and information, their ability to respond to the needs of their constituents will be improved.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That Committee approves the proposed scope and workstreams of the Member Communication and Engagement Programme of work as set out in Appendix A and the body of the report.
- 2) That an update report on programme progress be brought to Committee in November 2019.

Marjorie Toward

Service Director Customers, Governance and Employees and Monitoring Officer

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Marjorie Toward, Service Director, Customers, Governance and Employees and Monitoring Officer

Constitutional Comments (SLB 09/07/2019)

26. Policy Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

Financial Comments (SES 10/07/19)

27. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report. Further detail on the overall resources required will be reported at a later stage.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All