

COUNCILLOR SERVICES GROUP

17 June 2009

Present at the meeting:

Councillors G. Bretherton (Chairman), S. Barnes, H. Cadman, R Derricutt, J. Ellis, G.A. Fairhurst, Gareth Fairhurst, P Holland, J. Moodie and N. Whittingham.

Officers in attendance

D Smith – Executive Director of Business Support Services
C Page – Insurance Officer
G Finch – Principal Officer – Overview and Scrutiny
S Dale – Policy and Planning Manager
K Long – Programme Support Officer
B Leigh – Principal Officer – Member Support

ACTION

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| <p>1. APOLOGIES: Councillors, D. Hodgkinson, J. Miller, R Splaine, R Winkworth and M. Winstanley.</p> | |
| <p>2. MINUTES: The minutes of 1 April 2009 were accepted, but Councillor Ellis took the opportunity to ask that training courses should be designed with the needs of members in mind. Councillor Ellis said that he was supportive of the effort to make training available to all members of the council; but there had been a great many seminars and development sessions of late. The Chairman said that councillor development reviews existed to help in the identification and prioritisation of individual training priorities. Use of the review process would help to give individual members ownership of training; it would become proactive rather than reactive. Councillor Gareth Fairhurst sought clarification on the widening of the draft protocol covering the use of council resources; he queried the need to include member use of the council's IT network. The Executive Director of BSS responded by citing recent examples of quite lengthy e-mail correspondence between members of the council. The concern was that such correspondence could not reasonably be seen to relate to the role of elected members. The intention was to make available guidance to all members of the council covering such issues.</p> | <p>All members</p> <p>Executive Director/
Borough Solicitor</p> |
| <p>3. URGENT BUSINESS: None for consideration.</p> | |
| <p>4. CAR INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTED MEMBERS: Chris Page, the Insurance Officer briefed the Group on the requirement for elected members to hold business use car insurance whilst on official duties. Elected Members frequently opted to use their private vehicle when travelling to training events or conferences, and this usage gave rise to the need to include business use within their car insurance arrangements.</p> | |

Councillor Gareth Fairhurst said that he operated on the basis that it was always best to be absolutely clear and give full disclosure as to intended categories of car use. Councillor Whittingham recalled his recent experience of renewing his car insurance; it had not been easy to register his role as an elected councillor. The Executive Director explained to the Group that the mileage allowance payable took into account the additional costs of holding car insurance for business use. The Chairman raised the issue of councillors who might have a company car pursuant to their main employment; he suggested that it would be sensible in such cases for the individual member to raise the matter with their employer. The Chairman thanked Mr Page for bringing the matter to the attention of the Group and asked that the advice should be circulated to all members of the council.

B Leigh

5. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME:** Gary Finch, Principal Officer for Scrutiny submitted a report to the Group outlining the development programme for members of the new scrutiny committees. The Group noted the contents of the report, and Mr Finch said that he was happy to answer questions about the development programme. The Group had no questions, but Councillor Gareth Fairhurst said that he had been advised by a solicitor that the call in process only required a request from an individual councillor. Councillor Moodie said that it was important for clarification to be provided on this issue for the guidance of all members. Clarification would be provided on this issue in due course.

G Finch

6. **LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK 2009:** Simon Dale, Policy and Planning Manager and Katie Long, Programme Support Officer updated the Group on the arrangements for Local Democracy Week (LDW). LDW was scheduled to start on 12 October 2009, with a programme of week long events. A detailed evaluation report had been compiled for the information of the Group, and the Policy and Planning Manager emphasised that the objectives of LDW were to generate interest in the work of the council and elected members in particular.

Following a review of the programme run in 2008, a number of changes were proposed. One suggestion was to run the Question Time event off site at a high school; there would be a day time and evening session. One difficulty with this approach was that the panel might involve members who did not represent the ward in which the school was located. The Chairman queried if potential schools had been identified, and other Group members then asked if consideration could be given to running the event at schools in their own localities. The Executive Director said that one option was to rotate the schools used over time; this would be fair and equitable to all members. Councillor Winstanley asked that consideration should be given to maximising the involvement of 6th form colleges, and Councillor Moodie suggested that it would be positive to involve Rose Bridge school. Councillor Moodie explained that the school had recently gained an excellent inspection report from Ofsted; its involvement would be a positive way of recognising the achievement. The Planning and Policy Manager acknowledged the points made by the Group and would endeavour to achieve an appropriate balance.

The Group was also briefed on proposals for the 'Mayor for a day' competition; this year the Mayor would visit the school of the winning entrant and the Mayoress would also be involved. Group members commented on

the importance of engaging with young people, and the Planning and Policy Manager said that the key was to find issues of real interest. A proposal had been made this year to run a contest involving schools in the production of short DVD's. These would involve pupils in addressing their understanding of the role of local democracy and elected members. It was hoped that this would provide a mechanism for schools to engage with elected members.

The Planning and Policy Manager reflected on the very high levels of engagement that had been achieved last year with the 'I'm a councillor get me out of here competition'. Councillor Gareth Fairhurst said that the questions had been quite repetitive, but he had wanted to give each young person a full and proper response. The Planning and Policy Manager said that the request for nominations would go out at the end of the summer holidays. With regard to additional activities, mention was made of blogs and the need to engage with family groups. It was suggested that the involvement of Adult Services might open up the potential for involving older people. The need to engage with 'hard to reach groups' was also acknowledged. Councillor Moodie referred to the recent European Elections and the low voter turnout. He felt that Local Democracy Week could be utilised to address the issues of low voter participation and the effect of none voting. Councillor Gareth Fairhurst opined that voters had perhaps exercised a conscious choice not to vote in the elections. Councillor Whittingham said that polling stations did not have a particularly high profile; perhaps banners could be used to signpost polling stations and to encourage voter participation.

The Planning and Policy Manger thanked the Group for their input and said that the next LDW officer planning meeting was scheduled for 26 June at lunch time. Member involvement was welcomed and would be central to a successful programme of events this year.

7. **MEMBER WORKPLACE HEALTH CHAMPIONS:** The Principal Member Support Officer referred to corporate efforts to put in place a number of workplace health champions. Employee champions would be responsible for communicating information to colleagues about events and activities designed to improve the general well being of the workforce. Given the leadership role of elected members, it was hoped that volunteers might come forward to champion and act as role models for healthier lifestyles. The motivation for doing so might be a personal desire to be healthier and active. Group members were asked to share this information with their colleagues, and any volunteers were asked to contact Alison Hughes, Head of Organisational Development. The Chairman said that the initiative might be of interest to Councillor Ash and his colleagues on the Adult Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.
8. **A.O.B:** The Chairman asked if Group colleagues had any other items for discussion. Councillor Ellis asked if the cycle had been changed for Planning Committee meetings. Councillor George Fairhurst said that no mention had made of this at Committee. Councillor Ellis expressed a concern that Town Centre Managers seemed to be concentrating their efforts on the larger population centres; he felt that there was little apparent cover in Hindley. The Principal Member Support Officer undertook to raise this concern with the appropriate officer. The Chairman asked for an update on the availability of the Year book. Councillor Whittingham asked that an

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update be provided to all members on Township arrangements. Group members also observed that there was a need for greater clarity on areas of responsibility in relation to Townships. Councillor Gareth Fairhurst asked for an update on the roll-out of the PACT process. Councillor Holland took the opportunity to comment positively on her experience within the PACT process to date.

Councillor Gareth Fairhurst reflected on a conversation he had recently had with an officer about the scheduling of meetings. Councillor Fairhurst said that meetings were apparently organised during the day so as to minimise costs. He made a plea for the needs of working members to be taken into account and the Chairman endorsed this request. Councillor Ellis also asked that officers should show greater awareness and understanding of the needs of Elected Members

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 19 August 2009