

## COUNCILLOR SERVICES GROUP

3 February 2010

### Present at the meeting:

Councillor G M Bretherton (Chairman)  
Councillor H L Cadman  
Councillor J Ellis

Councillor J D Hodgkinson  
Councillor Ms P L Holland  
Councillor J Moodie

### Officers in attendance

David Smith - Executive Director of Business Support Services  
Kevin Lawson – Service Director – Borough Solicitor  
Pete Livesey – Head of IT Services  
Brian Leigh – Principal Civic and Member Services Officer  
Diane Adshead – Committee Services Officer

### Observing

Councillor R Brierley  
Councillor B Merry

### ACTION

- 1 **Apologies:** Councillors S C Barnes, R J Derricutt, G A Fairhurst, G W Fairhurst, J Miller, R T Splaine, N R Whittingham, R Winkworth and M W Winstanley.
- 2 **Minutes:** The minutes of the meeting of 2 December 2009 were accepted as a correct record.  
  
The Principal Civic and Member Services Officer, Brian Leigh, informed Members that further to Councillor G A Fairhurst's enquiry regarding the use of microphones at the Planning Committee meetings, Steve Normington, Service Director had emailed Councillor Fairhurst and advised him that this issue would be picked up during the review which was currently underway.  
  
The Principal Civic and Member Services Officer further advised that he had investigated Councillor G W Fairhurst's information request regarding the number of live enquiries in the Member Enquiry System (MES), and as of 22 January 2010 there were 145 live enquiries in the system, and of these, 122 were Environmental Services enquiries.
- 3 **Urgent Business:** There were no items for consideration.
- 4 **Update on encryption of member laptop computers and data security:** The Head of IT Services, Pete Livesey, advised Members that the priority machines identified mainly within Children's Services and Adult's Services (almost 500 in total) had almost all been done and IT were now in a position

to begin encrypting Members laptops. The encryption process involved adding an extra password to laptops ensuring that if the hard drive was ever stolen or removed from the machine, it could not be accessed.

Members were asked to take their laptop to the IT help desk in the Civic Centre where it would be labelled and receipted and then collect it once encryption was complete. The Help Desk was open between 8.00am and 5.50pm on any working day. Alternatively, laptops could be left with the Help Desk before an evening meeting and be collected at an arranged time once encrypted. Any Member who could not collect their laptop due to transportation issues, should inform IT Help Desk who would be sympathetic to special delivery arrangements.

Members' personal laptops or personal computers would not be encrypted and Members were advised not to transfer any Council information from their Council laptops onto their personal computers or personal laptops or they could be in breach of data protection legislation if these machines were ever lost or stolen.

P Livesey

**5 Member/Officer Protocol:** The Service Director – Borough Solicitor, Kevin Lawson, sought Members' views on a draft version of the revised Officer/Member Protocol.

The Executive Director of Business Support Services, David Smith, and The Service Director – Borough Solicitor, Kevin Lawson, suggested to Members that a revised draft of the Member/Officer Protocol would be referred to the Executive and thereon to full Council. However, as previously discussed it would be helpful for a series of workshops between Members and Officers to be held based on the revised Protocol. The expectation was that the workshops would assist in identifying the need to further refine the provisions of the revised protocol.

The Service Director – Borough Solicitor advised that research in relation to other Member/Officer Protocols had identified a model which had been developed with the assistance of IDeA. Using this as a base, and adapting the draft to cover the known issues raised and experienced in Wigan, a revised draft protocol had been prepared. This draft had been considered by the officers' Strategic Management Team who had endorsed the revised protocol with a request for further consultation with the Standards Committee, Group Leaders and Members generally.

Members were advised that the draft protocol was clearer than the current version in use, and it endeavoured to better set out and describe the differing roles of Members and Officers. It set out the expectations that the Council would have for both Members and Officers and highlighted areas of potential difficulties. In particular it sought to address how complaints by both Members and Officers could be pursued without immediate reference to the Standards Committee or indeed to the Council's Chief Executive. It also addressed the potential for the informal resolution of issues, and more direct reference to the line managers of officers with an ability to escalate the issue to a more Senior Officer if required.

Members felt that workshops would be a beneficial exercise and would allow officers to gain an insight into the increasing workloads of Elected Members.

Workshops would also enable Members and Officers who had previously only ever had an email or telephone relationship, to meet in person and build trust. The Executive Director commented that these issues had also been raised by Officers who were keen to engage with, and have a better dialogue with Members.

Members also expressed concern regarding Officers speed and form of response on occasion. However, it was stressed that Members needed to be mindful of the restraints on Officers. Members could be openly critical of Officers in a public forum whereas Officers were not in a position to respond.

The Executive Director – Borough Solicitor agreed that the Protocol could be improved and advised that the revised version had been supported in principle by the Council's Standards Committee (minute 43 refers). This would be submitted to all group leaders for their comments.

K Lawson

- 6 Update on Members Enquiry System (MES):** The Head of IT Services advised Members of changes and updates to the MES software. The Service Director for Customer Transformation, Steve Peddie, had a training programme in place for all Elected Members. Members were concerned that the current MES system gave them a response number but did not give the title of their original query – this made it increasingly time consuming to cross reference the number to a specific enquiry.

Officers needed Members to assist in the smooth running of the system; currently there were 4000 live enquiries outstanding at Councillor level that needed to be signed off. A further update would be provided at the next Group meeting in March.

P Livesey

- 7 Councillor Training and Development Strategy 2010-11:** The Principal Civic and Member Services Officer referred Members to the Councillor Training and Development Strategy. He summarised its aims and objectives and briefed members as to a number of changes that had been made in the light of staffing changes and training. Councillors Services Group had a key role and responsibility for leading, co-ordinating and monitoring the Council's actions in delivering the training and development strategy. Members had an obligation to attend training to enable them to properly and effectively undertake their roles.

Members requested that future training be both relevant and engaging and agreed that the responsibility for identifying useful and suitable training should be theirs. Feedback was one of the most important tools used in training programmes and should be built into all future courses. The Group endorsed the strategy as a basis for supporting the training and development of all Elected Members.

B Leigh

- 8 A.O.B:** The Chairman asked colleagues if they had any comments or issues for discussion. Councillor J Ellis objected to the context of a letter sent to all Members by the Service Director - Borough Solicitor regarding comments made by a Member in the local press. Councillor Ellis considered the letter to be inappropriate as previous public statements by other Members had not been challenged. The Borough Solicitor advised that he could not comment on individual cases, however, he advised that the letter had been written at the request of the Standards Committee who had considered the comments

in the press to be inappropriate. It was stressed that investigations by the Standards Assessment Sub Committee were of a confidential nature, and that accordingly they should be treated as such.

K Lawson

**9 Date of Next Meeting:** 31 March 2010

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 7.00pm.