

SUBJECT: SUPPORT TO ELECTED MEMBERS

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE & TOWN CLERK

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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To consider the manner in which support is offered to elected members by officers.

2. Current Levels of Support

2.1 Councillors have a variety of duties and roles carried out in order to serve the public. Inevitably, majority of the time and effort entailed with these duties and roles fall directly upon the councillor. However, the Council also provides professional and logistical support to enable councillors to carry out their duties as efficiently and effectively as possible.

2.2 This report has been compiled to summarise the support currently offered in order that members can consider and offer feedback regarding the suitability of this support.

2.3 The form of support offered to councillors has adapted considerably in recent years. These changes have been particularly driven by greater access to and use of technology by councillors. For example while the introduction of tablet devices has increased the amount of support offered to councillor with regard to IT, it has enabled councillors to carry out more of their ward work directly. While in the past officers might have been required to coordinate communication with residents and officers through letters and memorandums, many councillors now carry this out directly by email.

2.4 Equally the level of direct staff support has been reduced following the removal of the Member Support Team in 2009 and the absorption of its duties within Democratic Services.

3. Areas for Consideration

3.1 Members' IT

The Council provides all elected members with option to use a tablet device if they receive their committee agendas via the device. In addition, members are also able to claim £240 pa in relation to broadband internet, £60 pa towards a PC, and £15 pa towards a printer. The councillor can also borrow a PC or printer in lieu of the relevant allowance. Members are also able to access the Council's IT systems remotely using a computer.

3.2 Ward Surgery Support

Many councillors hold regular ward surgeries. This can take the form of regular

drop-in sessions at a fixed location or roving surgeries, where residents can book appointments or display a poster in their window requesting a visit from a councillor. Holding ward surgeries is often an effective means for councillors to hear from residents and businesses in their ward.

3.3 Councillors holding ward surgeries often promote these events using flyers and posters which they then deliver to residents' houses. Having regard to the advantages of ensuring the Council and its members are as accessible as possible, many of these flyers and posters are designed and printed by the Council. As well as offering the chance to highlight any issues to their local councillor, the flyers promote the public visibility and awareness of elected members. The Council also promotes ward surgeries by providing a link in the *Your Lincoln* magazine to the relevant details on the Council's website.

3.4 However, in recent years the cost of providing ward surgery posters has escalated. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors including an increased number of ward surgeries and the increased quality of the flyers following a switch from printing in-house. While the external printing is considerably cheaper on a per unit basis, the increased quantity of printing is likely to have displaced these savings. As such, the relevant budget-holder is examining options to limit the printing costs. This is likely to take the form of a maximum number of flyers that can be printed per councillor per year.

3.5 Protocol for Response Times

Elected members have previously raised concerns regarding the amount of time which some Council departments take to respond to queries. In response to this, a protocol was developed and circulated in 2014 allowing members to refer queries through specified officers who would seek to guarantee a response within a set time. The general principles of the protocol are as follow:

- All officers will do their best at all times to give timely responses to member enquiries in accordance with the set timescales, irrespective of whether they were contacted directly or through the nominated single point of contact for each directorate . Under normal circumstances this will be five working days.
- Officers are committed to providing high quality, professional responses to issues by giving clear, consistent and accurate information.

3.6 Member Casework

Councillors are often approached by residents in their and others' wards for assistance. This assistance can be in relation to council services, but can also relate to other areas, including public bodies and private disputes. Members will often approach officers or external organisations for support directly, but also liaise with Democratic Services for advice or assistance in resolving problems.

3.7 The Council temporarily funded access to an online casework management system which allowed members to log casework details on a bespoke system via a web browser. Access to this system was cancelled owing to its cost and relative lack of use among members.

3.8 Political Work

Members will be aware of the line to be drawn between the duties of a councillor and their political roles, which can be closely entwined. While there is often some

ambiguity in certain instances, Council resources cannot be allocated to support personal political work, whether in the form of financial support or officer time.

4. Organisational Impacts

4.1 Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 That members consider and offer feedback regarding the quality of support currently offered to elected members.