



**Committee:** COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

**Date:** THURSDAY, 10 AUGUST 2006

**Venue:** MORECAMBE TOWN HALL

**Time:** 4.00 P.M.

## **A G E N D A**

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Minutes**

Minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2006.

3. **Items of Urgent Business authorised by the Chairman**

4. **Declarations of Interest**

5. **Commitment to the North West Charter for Elected Member Development (Pages 1 - 18)**

Report of Head of Democratic Services.

6. **Communication Toolkit for Members (Pages 19 - 36)**

Report of Corporate Director (Finance & Performance).

7. **Special Council Meeting (Pages 37 - 40)**

Report of Head of Democratic Services.

8. **Feedback on Process for Consultation Papers**

## **ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS**

**(i) Membership**

Councillors Susan Bray (Chairman), Evelyn Archer (Vice-Chairman), Maggie Chadwick, Anne Chapman, Geoff Knight, Joyce Pritchard and Peter Robinson

**(ii) Substitute Membership**

Councillors Abbott Bryning, Gina Dowding and Alex Stone

**(iii) Queries regarding this Agenda**

Please contact Gillian Noall, Head of Democratic Services - telephone: 01524 582060 or email [gnoall@lancaster.gov.uk](mailto:gnoall@lancaster.gov.uk).

**(iv) Changes to Membership, substitutions or apologies**

Please contact Members' Secretary, telephone 582170, or alternatively email [memberservices@lancaster.gov.uk](mailto:memberservices@lancaster.gov.uk).

MARK CULLINAN  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
TOWN HALL,  
LANCASTER LA1 1 PJ

Published on Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006

**COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE****COMMITMENT TO THE NORTH WEST CHARTER FOR  
ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT  
10<sup>th</sup> August 2006****Report of Head of Democratic Services****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To note the progress made towards the Charter for elected Member development and the work still to be done.

**This report is public**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the Committee notes the report.**

**1. Introduction and background**

Back in 2002, Mark Cullinan and Councillor Ian Barker, on behalf of the authority, signed up to the North West Charter for elected Member development, which sets out a commitment to the support and development of elected Members in their roles. By signing up to the Charter, the Council has committed to work towards the development of its elected Members by implementing the following six key points of the Charter:

- Having a Statement of Intent.
- Ensuring that all Members are made aware of training and development opportunities.
- Having a process to identify individual development needs which involved Members.
- Having an officer allocated to assist Members and groups in identifying needs and providing information on resources.
- Having a strategy to meet the training and development needs of elected Members.
- Implementing the strategy locally.

The North West Employers Organisation has produced some guidance notes for authorities who are working towards achieving the Charter. A copy of the guidance notes are attached at Appendix A. Pages 3–13 of the guidance notes set out the process for working towards the Charter and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that the Council meets the six key points of the Charter.

## **2. Progress towards the Charter**

In terms of progress towards the Charter, the Council has already started working towards some of the key points of the Charter, as set out below:

### Signing the Charter

The Charter was signed by Mark Cullinan and Councillor Ian Barker in 2002 and copies of the Charter will shortly be on display in Morecambe and Lancaster Town Hall receptions.

### Champions for Member Development

The Council Business Committee, as an all party Member group, will act as champions for the work of Member development and the Chairman of the Council Business Committee will be the lead Member with responsibility for Member development.

### Dedicated officer and budgetary support for Members

The budget for Member and officer training is held by Nigel Parish, Learning and Development Officer. In view of the progress being made towards the Charter, officers have been identified in Democratic Services to work in conjunction with Nigel Parish for Members' training. In addition, the work and support by officers in Member Services will supplement the work toward the Charter.

### One to one interviews

During the last six months, approximately 32 Members have had one to one interviews with Nigel Parrish and James Doble to discuss their future development and support needs. Work will need to continue to promote the take up of the one to one interviews to other Members and in particular new Members. The outcome of the interviews have informed the Training and Development Programme and each of the 32 Members now own a plan setting out their identified learning and development needs and support will be given Members to help them meet their needs to assist them in their roles and to review existing plans. The interviews also gave a valuable insight into the requirements of new Members and the need for an induction programme, tailored to meet the needs of newly elected Members.

### Elected Member Training and Development Programme

The outcome of the one to one interviews have informed a comprehensive Elected Member Training and Development Programme which aims to specifically address Member development and support. The first edition of the Training and Development Programme for May 2006 to May 2007 was recently circulated to Members. The Training and Development Programme will be updated from time to time to reflect the changing needs of Members. Work will continue to promote, develop and update the Training and Development Programme to offer mentoring, shadowing and a library of learning resources.

### Councillors Newsletter

The first edition of the Councillors newsletter was recently published which launched the first edition of the Training and Development Programme. This online newsletter aims to keep Members updated on the progress in Member development and of work towards the Charter. It is suggested that future editions of the newsletter could include features on forthcoming training opportunities, feedback from training events held, updates on Member development and articles from Members.

## Dedicated Members area on the intranet

This area is currently being developed and will contain a copy of the Training and Development Programme and other useful information that Members require access to. Members will be asked to suggest what types of information and links they would find useful in this dedicated area.

### **3. Future work towards the Charter**

Despite good progress being made towards elected Member development, there is still a great deal of work to still be done before the Council can put itself for assessment to be awarded the North West Charter.

It is suggested that this work include:

#### Members Induction Programme

In order to build on the Training and Development Programme and the outcome of the one to one interviews, a comprehensive Members' Induction Programme should be developed that is tailored to meet the needs of newly elected Members for the election in May 2007. It is suggested that this should include pre-induction information i.e. dates for their diaries, an induction day to meet key officers and tour of Town Hall, a Members' handbook which will include all the basic information Members need to know in their first few weeks as a councillor and a follow up programme of statutory committee and skill based training and a tour of the district and key buildings and developments.

#### Member Development Strategy

There is a requirement that in order to meet the Charter a Member Development Strategy to meet the training and development needs of elected Members should be developed and implemented. The Strategy should set out clear direction, the resources to be made available and the links between Member development and the corporate aims and objectives of the authority. The Council will also need a process to review the Strategy.

#### Monitoring of training and evaluations

It is suggested that the attendance, feedback and evaluations of Member training events be monitored.

#### Member Development Surgeries

It is suggested that Democratic Services formalise and host dedicated 'Member development surgeries' prior to Council meetings. These surgeries could be another method of providing support to Members by being available for advice, assistance or to book on training events or simple things like returning mail delivery bags etc.

Alongside this, work will need to continue to improve and develop the good work already done and build on that. Please note, this is not a definitive list and these work areas and priorities might change or others may be added.

Members might wish to consider whether they would find it beneficial to visit other local authorities who have already achieved the Charter. Locally, these authorities are Carlisle, Preston, South Ribble, Lancashire, Blackpool, Fylde and the Lake District National Park Authority.

**4. Conclusion**

It is recognised that if the Council is awarded the North West Charter, it will in turn raise the overall profile of Lancaster within the North West and demonstrate to current and potential councillors, the commitment to elected members here in Lancaster.

**RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The work of Member development supports the corporate priority – to continue to improve the Council.

**CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

There are no direct implications.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The budget for Member and officer training and development is held by the Learning and Development Officer and will be used towards the work of Member training and development.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been contacted and has no further comments.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None directly arising from this report.

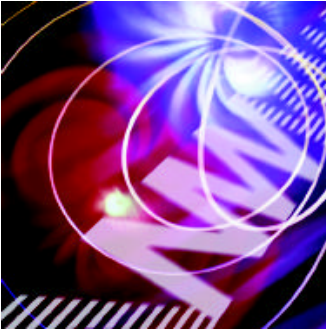
**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NWEO Guidance notes.

**Contact Officer:** Suzanne Trippier  
**Telephone:** 01524 582074  
**E-mail:** smtrippier@lancaster.gov.uk  
**Ref:**



NORTH WEST EMPLOYERS

**GUIDANCE NOTES  
FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
WORKING TOWARDS ACHIEVING**

***THE NORTH WEST CHARTER  
ON  
ELECTED MEMBER  
DEVELOPMENT***

Amended May 2004

**NORTH WEST CHARTER**  
*on*  
***Elected Member Development***

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**Municipal Journal and North West Employers**

We believe that at the heart of any Local Authority dedicated to meeting the needs of its community will be a commitment to the development of its elected members. Members will be supported and assisted in playing their vital role in modernising local government.

Signing up to the principles of the Charter commits the local authority to work towards expressing their commitment in practice by implementing the six key points of the Charter.

- Having a statement of intent.
- Ensuring that all members are made aware of training and development opportunities.
- Having a process to identify individual development needs which involves members.
- Having an officer allocated to assist members and groups in identifying needs and providing information on resources.
- Having a strategy to meet the training and development needs of elected members.
- Implementing the strategy locally.

Signed by Chief Executive: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by Chair of  
Employers' Organisation \_\_\_\_\_



## REGIONAL MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

During 1999 the Employers' Organisation agreed a regional strategy on member development. The strategy was crafted by the regional task group which was made up of 7 elected members who contributed not only their expertise but their energy and enthusiasm. The three elements of the regional strategy are:

***gaining commitment  
regional provision  
involving members***

The concept of a charter was borne out of a desire to encourage commitment to member development and to reward those authorities who have demonstrated that commitment. The North West Charter on Member Development will provide tangible evidence of a local authority's commitment to long-term investment in the development of its elected members.

The ethos of the Charter is built around the third element of the regional strategy "involving members" in their own development. One of the ways of doing this is having a Member Development Group made up of members from all the political groups plus the officer responsible for member development. One of the other things that as assessors we hope for, but something which is difficult to measure, is enthusiasm demonstrated by the members and the officer(s). If you have it you're half way there!

The Charter operates at two levels, similar to the Investor in People Award. Firstly local authorities sign a declaration to show their commitment to the principles of the Charter, secondly, following external assessment, local authorities are awarded the Charter to show they have demonstrated their commitment in practice and have all the required elements in place.

We are particularly pleased that Municipal Journal share our interest in member development and they are supporting the initiative by awarding a special merit prize at our celebration event.

These guidance notes have been prepared to help local authorities working towards the Charter understand the process. They will give an indication of the evidence which would support an application for a Charter.

Each local authority will have its own approach to developing members, with some having a long tradition of providing excellent development opportunities, and others just starting.

However, irrespective of the starting point, local authorities can still sign up by giving their commitment to the principles contained within the Charter. There is no time limit between declaration and assessment. Whilst some authorities may be ready now, others may need time to put the elements in place. The intention of the Charter was to encourage the development of a learning culture, not a quick fix, and therefore Charters will be awarded annually. In addition to the guidance notes, information and advice is available from North West Employers and you can call Liz McQue on 0161 834 9362, e-mail [lizm@nweo.org.uk](mailto:lizm@nweo.org.uk) or Ruth Ashworth on 0161 214 7113, e-mail [rutha@nweo.org.uk](mailto:rutha@nweo.org.uk).

## **The Process**

### **Stage 1 - Declaration**

Local authorities need to sign the declaration of commitment to the principles included in the Charter; the Leader and the Chief Executive must sign this declaration. This is an important first step as it is intended to promote a healthy discussion on the authority's needs and intention in terms of member development. When you return your signed declaration, it will be signed by the Chair of the Employers' Organisation and returned to you, framed, ready for display.

If you are interested in signing up the principles of the Charter then you need to contact Ann-Marie Anderson on 0161 214 7101 or Ruth Ashworth on 0161 214 7113.

### **Stage 2 - Working towards the Charter**

Each local authority will have different things in place and this stage will be an opportunity to assess the existing situation against the standards. These guidance notes are intended to offer some information on what evidence will be required.

When your authority has decided that it wishes to begin working towards the Charter please ring Ruth Ashworth and arrange to discuss your progress towards the Charter. This discussion can take place over the telephone but it is more usual to arrange a face to face meeting. If at all possible elected members should be involved in the meeting.

When you feel you have everything in place all you need to do is contact North West Employers and a pre-assessment visit (a meeting involving officers and members) and a formal verification visit will be organised. Local authorities usually compile a portfolio of evidence (two copies of these will be needed at least 3 weeks before the visit). An elected member from the regional member development task group and an officer from North West Employers will undertake this. The visit will be in part to check that the authority meets the standards, but also an opportunity to discover different approaches which can be shared as good practice.

Some local authorities already have a tradition of member development and may have all the elements in place for an early verification visit, but for others it may take a longer time to develop a culture, which supports member development. As always, help, advice and information can be obtained from North West Employers.

### **Stage 3 - Awarding the Charter**

Authorities who have reached the standards of the Charter and demonstrated their commitment to member development have cause to celebrate their achievement. Each year a celebration event will be held where all those local authorities who have achieved the standards will be invited to receive their Charter. Additionally, a special merit prize will be awarded by the Municipal Journal who will also provide press coverage of the event.

Immediately after the Celebration Event we put together a newsletter which is sent out to all Elected Members in the North West. This newsletter celebrates the achievements of the authorities who were successful and promotes good practice within member development in the North West. Authorities will be asked to produce an article for this newsletter approx 1 page of A4.

### **Stage 4 - Re-assessment**

Once awarded, the Charter will have a lifespan of three years, after which, local authorities will be asked to submit details of how they have sustained and further developed their commitment to member development.

**Guidance notes on evidence to support an application for the North West Charter.**

The following pages provide details of types of evidence which could be provided for each of the six elements.

## Having a statement of intent

### *What could be offered as evidence?*

- A signed "declaration of commitment" to the principles of the North West Charter.
- A written statement which has been circulated to all elected members publicly expressing the local authority's commitment to developing its elected members.

Examples of this might be: copies of minutes of meetings where the decision to sign the Charter was made; copy of the "declaration of commitment" circulated to all members; a statement made by the Leader and Chief Executive circulated to all members; articles in newsletters to members, emails to all members.

- A clear indication from a sample of members interviewed that they "have seen a statement of intent, and feel there is a real commitment to the development of elected members".

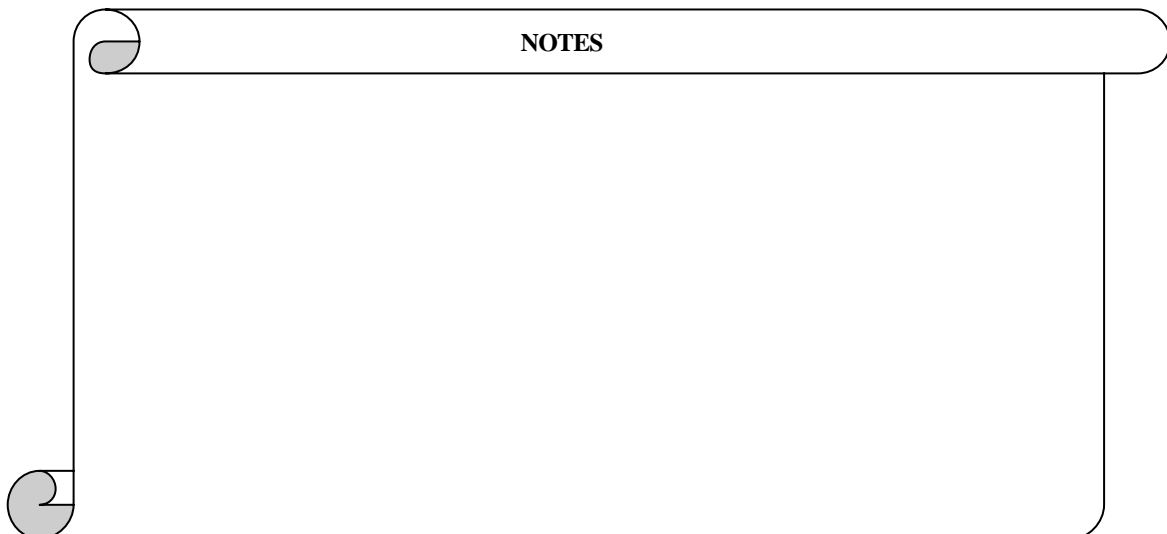
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## **Ensuring that all elected members are made aware of training and development opportunities**

### ***What could be offered as evidence?***

- Reference to training and development opportunities during new members' induction process.
- Examples of newsletters giving details of development opportunities available within the local authority.
- Training and development appears as an agenda item through the political groups.
- A process which gives members access to information about opportunities for development outside the local authority.
- Information displayed in members' room or library.
- Information on development opportunities displayed on an intranet.
- Information about development opportunities circulated on e-mail or by post.
- Existence of an all party member training group.
- A cabinet member with responsibility for member development who is part of the member training group or who has a direct line of communication with the member training group.

### **NOTES**



## Having a process to identify individual development needs which involves members

### *What could be offered as evidence?*

- Completed questionnaires which have been circulated to all members giving them the opportunity to identify what their development needs are.
- The provision of one to one personal development interviews aimed at helping members identify their development needs and how these might be best met.
- Examples of information given to members to help them identify their individual learning styles (individually or as part of workshop).
- A mechanism which involves members in analysing the information gathered from a training needs analysis exercise, eg training and development group
- The nomination of a lead member who is responsible for members' training and development.
- Session plans and summaries from group TNA sessions.
- Examples of completed personal development plans for members.
- Training Programme for a development needs analysis workshop for members.

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## **Having a strategy to meet the training and development needs of elected members**

### ***What could be offered as evidence?***

- A strategy which sets clear direction, and covers identification of needs, resources to be made available, approaches to delivery, evaluation process, and success criteria (preferably which has been formally accepted through a committee or executive forum) and which can be shown to contribute to the local authority achieving its aims and objectives.
- Records of discussions which clearly articulate the direction and key elements of the authority's approach to member development.
- A process to review the strategy, at least annually, which involves elected members.
- Examples of development opportunities which demonstrate that the strategy is more than a list of courses eg, open learning materials, shadowing opportunities, mentoring schemes, etc.
- A process or criteria to determine priorities.
- A link between member development and the corporate aims and objectives of the authority.

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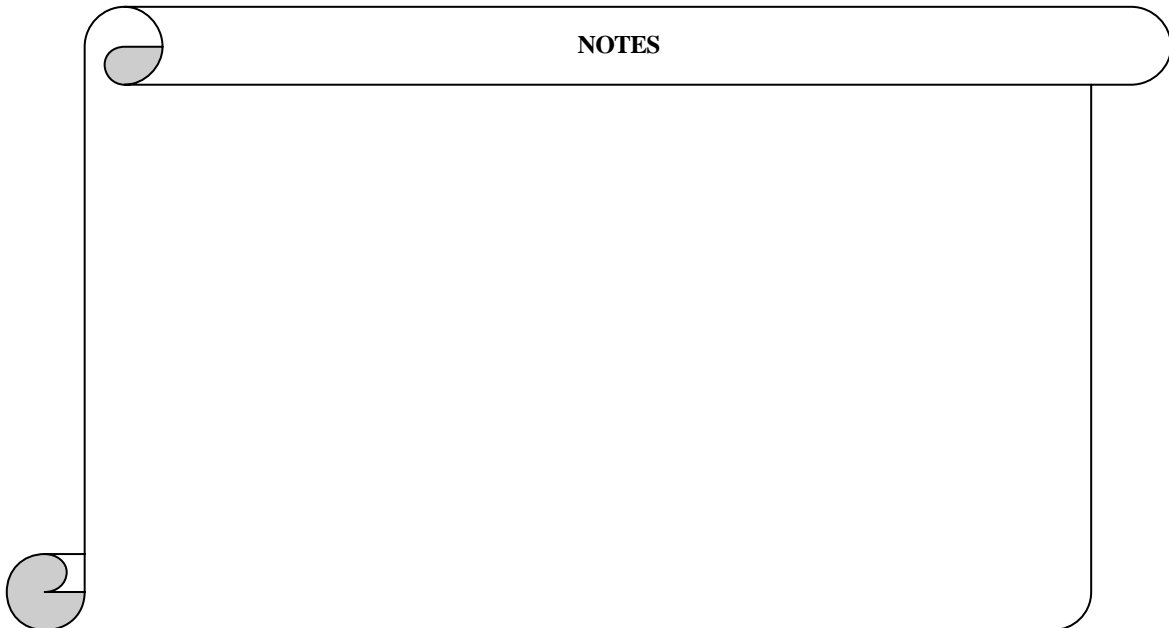


**Having an officer allocated to assist members and groups in identifying needs and providing information on resources**

***What could be offered as evidence?***

- Any written reference which informs members which officer they can contact for information.
- Contact details for the officer are made available to new members.
- Details of the available resources in the members' room, newsletter etc.
- That the named officer can advise members on different approaches to identifying their development needs, and can provide information on internal and external training events.

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### ***Implementing the strategy locally***

***What could be offered as evidence?***

- Outcomes of a training needs analysis exercise.
- Individual development plans for members.
- Schedule of development events.
- Individual record for each member detailing training and development activities.
- Evaluation and review of events in terms of effectiveness.
- A process to review and update development needs of members.
- Evidence of evaluating the development offered and the impact it has had which has involved members in reviewing the strategy and its implementation.

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## About the Assessment Visit

- Each visit will include one elected member from the North West Employers Regional Development Committee or Executive Board plus an officer from North West Employers.
- The visit will be arranged in advance and will last for approximately one day. An officer of North West Employers will liaise with the relevant officer from the authority to make the arrangements.
- A room and refreshments will need to be made available for the assessment team.
- During the visit the assessment team will want to speak to:
  - The Leader (or Deputy)
  - The Chief Executive
  - Leader of an opposition group
  - Chair or portfolio holder
  - Chair or Member of Training Group
  - A newly Elected Member
  - Several randomly picked Elected Members
  - The officer responsible for member training
- The interviews will take around 20-25 minutes
- At the end of the visit the assessment team will give the authority brief feedback on how the visit went. If it was felt that some elements of the evidence were incomplete then the authority would be advised of that.
- If it was felt that the evidence was complete then the assessment team would produce a report for the Regional Development Committee which usually meets twice a year around April and September.
- The Regional Development Committee can:
  - (a) Award the Charter
  - (b) Defer awarding until missing elements are in place
- Authorities can be assessed at any time during the year and after the Regional Development Committee meeting will be told formally that they have been awarded the Charter. However, Celebration Events are only held once a year.

***Questions that could be asked at verification visits...***

- How have you made all elected members aware of the authority's commitment to training and development?
- How are new elected members informed about this commitment to their development?
- How often is information circulated to members?
- How are new members informed about training and development opportunities?
- How do members know that they can get help to identify their development needs?
- Is the development planning an ongoing process, is it part of course reviews, open learning material or just once a year?
- How are members involved in assessing the outcomes of the training needs analysis and deciding priorities?
- How was the strategy formulated?
- How were members involved in developing the strategy?
- How has the strategy been communicated to members?
- What has been improved since the strategy has been developed?
- How often do individuals or groups approach the officer for advice?
- Is the officer involved in the discussions about members' training and development needs?
- What resources have been made available to implement the strategy?
- Who has responsibility for implementing the strategy?
- Do you have role descriptions for elected members?

**Council Business Committee****Communications Toolkit for Members  
10 August 2006****Report of Corporate Director (Finance & Performance)****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To seek Committee's approval for the adoption of a toolkit to provide Members with a general and basic guide to communications.

**This report is public**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) **That the Committee considers the adoption of the toolkit for inclusion in the Members Induction Pack.**

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Research by MORI shows the majority of people do not know much about Members. However, this is not because they are disinterested, but because few of them have had any communications with their Ward Member – unless something has gone wrong.
- 1.2 The draft toolkit, **attached at Appendix A**, has been developed by the Communications Team with advice from Democratic and Information & Customer Services and approved by Corporate Management Team for consideration by this Committee.
- 1.3 As the toolkit is only designed to be a general and basic guide to communications, Members will wish to be mindful in appropriate circumstances of the Protocols contained in the Council's Constitution, such as the Protocol on Planning, Protocol on Member/Officer Relations and the Press and Media Guidelines – if necessary, further advice can be sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

**2.0 Proposal Details**

- 2.1 That if Committee agrees to adopt the toolkit, that it be included in the Member Induction Pack.

**3.0 Details of Consultation**

- 3.1 N/A

**4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

4.1 N/A

**5.0 Conclusion**

5.1 That this Committee considers the adoption of the toolkit for inclusion in the Members Induction Pack.

**CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

The toolkit takes into account diversity and human rights requirements.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

It is not anticipated that there will be any further staffing and resource implications other than those that have already been accounted for.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Legal Services have been consulted and have no further comments to add.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Draft Members' Toolkit – July 2006

**Contact Officer:** Roger Muckle

**Telephone:** 01524 582022

**E-mail:** RMuckle@lancaster.gov.uk

**Ref:** RCM/ES/Cttees/BusinessCttee/10.08.07



**LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL**  
*Promoting City, Coast & Countryside*

# **COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT FOR MEMBERS**

**July 2006  
Communications Team**

## **Welcome to communications for newly elected Members**

Research by MORI shows the majority of people do not know much about Members. However, this is not because they are disinterested, but because few of them have had any communications with their Member – unless something has gone wrong.

Many Members, established and new, may already feel skilled and effective communicators. However, this may be a new arena for some Members and this toolkit, based on best practice from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), offers practical advice and case studies to help you communicate effectively with residents and effectively represent their views to the Council.

This guide is intended to be a general and basic guide to communications and Members will wish to be mindful in appropriate circumstances of the Protocols contained in the Council's Constitution, such as the Protocol on Planning, Protocol on Member/Officer Relations and the Press and Media Guidelines. If necessary, further advice can be sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer.



## Communicating with the community

There are many ways to promote your work locally and keep residents informed. You may well be doing some of these already. Best practice includes:

### 1. Surgeries

Holding a surgery is usually a given part of the Member role. Even with modern communications, such as email, the principle of open access to an elected Member is important. Details of surgeries should be included in your section on the Council's website by supplying the information to Member Services. (Members are responsible for organising their own surgeries, but these can be advertised via your website or on the Member information section of the Council's website. Assistance with this can be provided by Members' Services.

Below are some pointers for effective surgeries:

- do not be over ambitious – be realistic and increase the number of surgeries you hold gradually or hold one occasionally
- choose a suitable venue and consider factors, ie, access and accessibility for constituents, local transport links, privacy, communication facilities, building safety

#### ***How to Advertise and Promote your Surgery***

Once you have considered the above factors, you will need to advertise and promote your surgery, such as displaying posters in your ward. Check the information on your poster is correct and ensure a clearly laid out poster is fixed to the door of the venue or displayed prominently. Local community groups, schools or GP surgeries may also display it.

If you have to cancel or postpone an attendance, make sure that this is clearly posted on the door of the venue with as much notice as possible. One impromptu cancelled surgery can easily damage your reputation.

#### ***How to Manage your Surgery***

Think carefully about surgery timings. Ensure you can stick to the times you decide for your four-year term. If you advertise an end time to your surgery, you will have to stay until then, so it is easier to advertise a start time only.

You will sometimes have constituents who regularly attend your surgery. It may suit both of you to deal with each other face-to-face. Sometimes, it can be useful to ring or email a constituent if you know you will not have a response to their case by the time of the surgery. A quick call will save them the trouble of attending and wasting their time and it will save you time too. Also, it is advisable to check that a visitor to your surgery is actually your constituent and not from another ward – it would be useful to have contact numbers for Members from neighbouring wards to pass on to visitors to your surgery who are not your constituents.

As well as traditional surgeries, you should have a telephone number (it is advisable to have an answer machine) and email address where constituents can reach you or leave messages. Not everyone is able to attend a surgery, so enquiries and casework by phone and letter is equally important.

***However, it is important to always remember never to compromise your safety or leave yourself vulnerable when meeting Members of the public.***

Health and safety advice is available for Members. Please contact Democratic Services for further details.

## 2. Working in wards

To build relationships with residents, many Members leaflet-drop to houses in their ward on a regular basis, inviting their constituents to meet with them. Sessions are often informal and take place either in a local community venue, at their regular surgery or even in their home.

Sometimes sessions are held in partnership with County and Parish Members, with the local MP and with community representatives. Where other partners are asked to participate, it is good practice to ask residents to RSVP to ensure a reasonable turnout. Whilst it is an individual Member's responsibility to organise such an event, **assistance with contacting third parties can be provided by Members' Services.**

## 3. Walkabouts

Walkabouts can be useful for improving your awareness of local issues, as well as raising your profile, or that of the particular place you are visiting.

### *How to Organise Successful Walkabouts*

As in any professional situation, knowledge and preparation are the key to a successful outcome. Walkabouts may help you to get to know your ward and see situations at first-hand. They may seem time consuming, but could save time in the long run. **Requests for Officer attendance should be made via the relevant Service Head.**

If your walkabout is about a particular issue, you may want to advise residents in advance. If you are visiting a housing estate, for instance, you may want to contact the tenants association beforehand. You will get more out of the visit if you have a resident who knows the issues present and with you. Remember that you should give good notice. If the local tenant leader cannot meet you on the day, then you can always speak to them before the visit.

Try and follow up the pre-walkabout letter with one to residents afterwards – explaining what you found and what you can do as a result in terms of raising issues within the Council or elsewhere and pressing for action. **Support in preparing such letters can be provided by Members' Services, although you will have to pay for any printing costs or make your own arrangements for printing elsewhere.**

### *Officer involvement*

You may want to have regular walkabouts with Officers at pre-arranged venues. It may be useful and will certainly be more cost effective of Officers' time, if other Ward Members are invited at the same time. You can easily contact other Ward Members by email or through the Council's distribution system.

Walkabouts without the relevant Officer present can also be very useful. Make notes as you walk about - you can then use these notes to contact (or ask Member Services to do this for you) to the relevant Services.

If there is a big issue in your ward you may want to invite the Leading Members, relevant Officer(s) or Police representatives to view it for themselves. This is added value that you as a local Member can bring and it asserts your role as a key local link on the issues. Rules regarding matters such as licensing and planning are complex and Members should be mindful of the Protocol on Planning contained in the Council's Constitution and may wish to take

appropriate advice if dealing with such matters. **Please contact the Legal Services Manager on 582023 for more information.**

#### **4. Establishing partnerships with community groups and associations**

You have a unique role – acting as a link between the Council and community groups and associations.

##### **How to Establish Good Partnerships**

Soon after being elected it is good practice to research the local groups in your area, write to them and introduce yourself. Write to communities such as: faith groups; schools; known tenants and residents associations – you should be able to get addresses through the housing department; neighbourhood watch – the Police may be able to help or community groups and introduce yourself.

These relationships will keep you abreast of developments and feed back how Council services are working on the ground. Members' Services can provide secretarial support if required.

#### **5. Engaging hard-to-reach communities**

The hard-to-reach section covers a number of individuals and groups including:

- disabled people
- older people
- young people
- busy working people
- residents whose first language is not English
- parents of young children
- those with low literacy levels

These are all people whose interests and specific needs you will need to be aware of when deciding how to: work, run surgeries, organise meetings and provide information.

##### **How to Engage 'Hard to Reach' Communities**

The Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines, available under the Communications section of the intranet (link) recommends, on the advice of the Council's Access Officer, that correspondence should be typed in a 'sans serif typeface' such as Arial and in minimum font size: 11 point, without line justification.

All Councils have to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, but it is important you are aware of other needs of your constituents.

No Member is ever going to be able to have regular contact with all their constituents, but it is important you are aware of constituents' different needs and ensure none are unable to contact you.

Some communities will have obvious leaders through faith or community groups. You can use these people to help you reach constituents who may not easily reach you. If appropriate in your ward, you could offer to hold occasional surgeries for people with English as a second language with translators in place – however, you would be responsible for any costs for this type of service. Occasional visits or surgeries at older people's day centres or other groups can similarly help you reach people who find it physically difficult to reach you.

**Further suggestions on how to engage with hard to reach groups can be found in the Council's Consultation Strategy and Toolkit which can be found at:**

<http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/Documents/Corporate%20Strategy/ConsultationStrategyMarch2006.doc>

<http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/Documents/Corporate%20Strategy/ConsultationToolkitMarch2006.doc>

## **6. Using email and building a website**

Lancaster City Council provides all Members with a Council lap top, broadband and access to the Council's email and other corporate systems, so long as you are signed up to the Members' Laptop and computer Usage Policy - link when available)

There are powerful reasons why more and more Members are using email, the internet and even text messaging to communicate.

By investing a little time in developing the skills, if you do not already have them, you will add a fast, easy to use and cost effective communications tool to those you already use. You will also increase your ability to engage young people who otherwise might show little interest in local issues.

As part of the Implementing Electronic Government programme, every Council in England has been obliged to provide Members with the option of having their own easy-to-manage web pages. Lancaster City Council is using the existing committee management system to provide this facility.

### ***How to us IT Effectively***

**Training in the use of the system is available from Democratic Services. IT training on the use of computers generally is provided as part of your Member development programme. For more information contact the Council's Learning and Development Officer in Legal & Human Resources or Members' Services**

This section provides some basic tips on:

- using email
- setting up your own website as part of Modern.gov

**Electronic email** is now an indispensable communications tool. Whether or not your residents have home internet access, increasing numbers will be able to access email accounts through their work, public libraries, internet cafes and community facilities.

### ***Email***

The main benefits of email are that it is:

- cost-effective – the overall cost is far less than for a postal address
- easy to respond to – because of its interactivity and ease of response, recipients are often more likely to take action
- interactive – you can include links to your website or to the Council's
- fast to implement – you do not have to wait for your document to return from the printers
- easy to time – to ensure your message is timed to hit on a specific date

- easy to customise – if you are sending a document to a group, where each person can choose whether they want to receive your publication
- trackable – easy to tell whether someone has received an email and opened it and archive the audit trail
- easy to detect mail that has not been delivered – if someone closes their email account, you will receive an automatic 'return' response

### *Good practice*

Here are some tips to help make your email more effective:

- before sending an email consider whether the people you are addressing it to really need to see it. If you are sending them a regular publication such as a newsletter, give them the option of opting out of receiving it
- be brief and check your spelling and grammar
- use a meaningful heading in the subject box
- be careful before expressing dissatisfaction with someone in a personal email as the communication will be permanent
- always acknowledge or reply to personal emails you receive. If you are not going to be able to check your email for a few days, use the 'out of office auto reply'
- set up your personal stationery so your emails automatically sign off with your details ie, your name, address, contact numbers, fax or website
- You might find it useful to see the Council's Customer Service Guidelines for Officers, available under the Communications section of the intranet ([Link](#)) which have a section on emailing customers.

### *Setting up your own website*

The Council, through its **Democratic Services, provides training to support individual Members to set up their own website through its committee management system (Modern.gov)**. This is subject to Members signing up to the Website [Acceptable Use Policy \(link\)](#)

Those Members who wish to can create and update their website themselves for publication by Members' Services or alternatively information can be provided to Members' Services in any format for inclusion on an individual Member's website on their behalf.

Because this website facility is funded by a Local Authority, Members may not use this to promote political campaigns or advocate political stances on any issues – you may however have a link to an external website of a political nature such as that of your political party or your own privately funded website.

## **7. Public meetings**

If Officers are organising a public meeting on behalf of the Council, you may be asked for your views on a suitable venue in your Ward. Alternatively, you may wish to organise a public meeting yourself.

### ***How to Organise and Run an Effective Meeting – Pointers***

#### *Is the location right for the topic in question?*

- is the meeting near public transport, to attract people from a wide area?

## *Is the venue accessible?*

- you should expect level access or a lift
- good acoustics – preferably with a loop system for people who are hearing impaired
- if the meeting is likely to attract or aimed at parents, you will need to consider a crèche
- it is not usually possible to provide for all eventualities but pre-meeting publicity should ask people with access issues to advise in advance
- occasionally information needs to be provided in another format such as to blind or partially sighted residents, or on issues that affect the local ethnic population

## *What time of day is the meeting?*

- if you are trying to attract parents of young children, for example, evening meetings may not be the best time
- religious observance should also be considered such as Sabbath for Jewish and some Christian groups and Friday Prayers for Muslim groups
- if it is a regular meeting, you may want to change the day and or time of the meeting to accommodate different needs and balanced against the benefit of a regular time tabled slot

## *Is the venue appealing?*

- moderate the temperature of the room
- refreshments should also be considered, with a break half-way through

## *Are you chairing the meeting?*

- is the agenda manageable? – too long and it will put people off from attending
- lay out the ground rules at the beginning, such as the length of time people are allowed to speak

The principles apply to official Council meetings. You may also be invited to other meetings organised by local groups. If these exclude some people because they breach this good practice then you can raise this with the organisers. While they may have difficulties with the cost or choice of a venue, it is important you represent the interests of your constituents unable to access the meeting.

## **8. Speaking at public meetings**

Through its member training programme Lancaster City Council provides Members with public speaking/ presentation training if you need it (Contact the Learning and Development Officer in Legal & Human Resources for more information, or request through Members' Services ).

### ***How to be Effective when Speaking at Public Meetings – Pointers***

#### *Before the speech*

- talk to the chair - often you will be attending more than one meeting a night or day so it is critical you advise the chair of a meeting if you have to leave early or arrive late. This can help them organise a meeting so that the main item you are speaking on is scheduled for the right time.
- prepare - order your thoughts so that you can summarise your case in no more than four key points. However, avoid writing out a speech to read unless you are a keynote speaker because at most meetings you will have to react to what other speakers have said.. If you hear someone speak well, ask for some tips
- dress appropriately - your appearance will affect people's views about you.

## *During the speech*

- keep your speech short – do not overrun, especially if there are people standing
- speak loudly and clearly – it may sound obvious but lots of people don't. Aim your voice at something on the back wall of the room you're in
- allow time for translation – if you are speaking through a translator speak in short bursts of about two sentences and allow time for translation. Remember that jokes don't always translate well!
- if you don't know the answer, say so – when responding to questions it is better to admit that you don't know the answer than display ignorance with a bad answer. You can always offer to check and get back to the individual concerned
- listen - public meetings are an opportunity for the public to air their views so listening is important.
- take notes – write down questions, with names attached wherever possible, so you can respond directly to them. You may find it easier to respond to a few points altogether
- believe in yourself – you have a duty to speak up for your residents. They expect it of you, use this to overcome any lack of confidence you may have. And if someone says something you don't understand don't be afraid to say so: you will probably be speaking for many in the audience
- ask for feedback – whether or not you are an experienced public speaker, it is always a good idea to get some honest feedback from someone who has heard you speak at a meeting such as a colleague Member, an Officer or even a resident you know well. Once people know you are prepared to hear honest feedback they will be pleased to be asked.

## *Speaking from the platform*

If you are speaking from the platform you need to be well prepared. Take time to order your thoughts before making notes or writing a speech. Be on top of the issue you are talking about. However well you have prepared your speech, there will be issues which people are not sure about and will want to question you on.

Sometimes issues raised from the floor will be points rather than questions. Don't be afraid to agree with someone who has made a critical point as long as you can explain why the Council made a particular decision.

Remember that the more you speak the more confident and able you become. You were elected to speak up for local residents, it's an essential part of the job.

## **9. Starting a newsletter**

Research by MORI has found that Council newsletters are one of the main ways in which residents like to be kept informed about their local authority. Newsletters can also be a useful and cost effective way for individual Members to communicate with their constituents and keep them informed about their work.

However, they are rarely a quick and easy option for getting your messages across, so before starting one, there are a number of factors you should consider. This section will help you think about whether a newsletter is the best of way of communicating with your constituents and if you decide to produce one, how to make sure it is effective It includes:

- are there more effective ways of communicating with your constituents
- planning the newsletter (including frequency and distribution)
- making your newsletter stand out.

## *Are there more effective ways of communicating with your constituents?*

Even simple newsletters require planning, thought, time and resources to produce and distribute. In addition, written information is rarely as effective as face-to-face communication.

Think about how the newsletter will fit in with the other things you are doing to communicate with your constituents. Are you already attending events, doing walkabouts and speaking at community meetings in your constituency? Do you communicate with residents through the existing media such as the local press and other community publications like tenants newsletters?

Unless your answer to these questions is “yes,” think about doing these things, which can be more effective than producing your own newsletter and will undoubtedly take up less of your time and resources, before starting your own one.

## ***How to Produce a Newsletter***

### *Planning the newsletter*

If you would like to publish your own newsletter the information below will help you make it an effective one.

- **Frequency and length**

It is a good idea to make the frequency and length as uniform as possible so readers know what to expect and when to expect it.

When deciding frequency and length, be realistic about the time and resources you can commit to producing and distributing the newsletter and how much news you will have to write about. Although there may be lots of things you want to communicate in the first issue, think about whether you will have anything new to say by the sixth edition.

It is far better to start with a short two-sided newsletter that you can produce two or three times a year throughout your term in office, than to publish a sixteen page one that you are unable to sustain. In the main, residents will prefer something that is two sides of A4 than a weighty tome.

- **Distribution**

There is no point in writing one unless you have an effective distribution method. The different ways you could distribute the newsletter include:

- by email: email is the cheapest and quickest way but relies on you having the email addresses of the people you want to receive it
- by hand through letterboxes: if your constituency is in a large urban area, there are likely to be local companies that distribute information such as take away menus for a fee
- through other local organisations: you will probably find that local organisations and community groups are more than happy to send out your newsletter to their Members with their own mail outs. If you are using this method of distribution, make sure that your publication dates coincide with the mail outs of the various groups that distribute your newsletter
- by post: keep a list of key local contacts, opinion-formers and organisations and make sure you send them their own individual copy of the newsletter
- through public buildings: ask community groups and businesses whether they are willing to display copies of your newsletter for people to pick up. **Note that Council buildings and groups funded by the Council are not allowed to display information that can**



**be deemed to be party political or can promote individual Members.** For more information on this, see [PR and the law](#)

- at public events: take a batch of newsletters along to public meetings and events that you attend.
- [Making your newsletter stand out](#)

Unless you are a skilled IT operator, you will probably find that a Microsoft Word document is the simplest type of newsletter to produce. The points below will help you make your publication interesting.

- be timely: it may seem obvious but there's no point in writing about old news. Be particularly careful when including dates of forthcoming public meetings and events – your constituents will be frustrated if they want to attend them but receive your publication once they have already taken place
- be relevant: think about who you are writing for. Your readers are likely to be a diverse group of people in terms of their ages, backgrounds and interests so try to write about issues that will interest as many of them as possible
- use plain English: few people understand jargon and acronyms.
- keep your articles short: you are far more likely to engage your audience if your articles are short and concise and made up of short simple sentences
- use colour: if you have access to a colour printer or photocopier, include colour in your newsletter. If not, think about printing it on coloured paper
- use columns and headings: columns and headings will help to break up the pages and define the articles, making your newsletter easier to read
- a picture is worth a thousand words: good quality pictures and photographs will encourage people to pick up and read your newsletter and help communicate things that words will not – use them if you can
- include your contact details: don't forget to tell people you have produced the newsletter and invite their comments on it by including your contact details.

**The Communications Team, within Corporate Strategy, can provide advice on producing a newsletter.**

## **10. The media**

Whether you are promoting a viewpoint, or defending a reputation, this section will help you manage your contact with the media, as will the [Council's Media Guidelines \(link\)](#) In addition, the Council offers media training for Members (for more information contact the Learning & Development Officer in Legal & Human Resources or speak to Members' Services).

This section covers:

- Your political office
- The Council's Communications Team
- Conflicts of interest
- Using the media to promote positive stories
- What makes a news story
- How do I get my story in the media
- Reacting to bad news stories
- Writing a statement

### *[Role of your political group](#)*

If you represent a political party, they will probably have regular contact with the media and will be able to provide advice, information and support on managing the media, such as writing

news releases and articles on your behalf. They may also have a protocol in place about who should talk to the media and about alerting the lead Member or the group office first. This is usually to ensure all statements are based on the full information. **Your Group Leader/Group Administrator will be able to advise you on this.**

### *The Council's Communications Team*

The Communications Team is the first point of call for Council (as opposed to Member) media enquiries and the [Media Guidelines \(link\)](#) set out the procedures for Officers dealing with such enquiries.

It is our role to respond to media enquiries on behalf of the Council; protects its reputation; and promotes its public profile by encouraging positive media coverage of its work. We have regular contact with local journalists, issue news releases and statements on behalf of the Council and we have responsibility for producing the Council's community magazine – Your District Council Matters [\(link\)](#), in conjunction with a Member Editorial Team, comprising one representative from each of the five political groups on the Council.

When dealing with the media, Council officers operate within the legal framework set out in the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. These ensure that Council publicity informs constituents rather than persuades them to hold a particular viewpoint. They also stipulate that local authorities should not publish material that affects public support for a particular party.

The code of practice on publicity, which has the force of law, states that it is inappropriate to publicise individual Members in a non-executive position except basic information such as contact details, their responsibilities and any proposals or recommendations that are relevant to their position. The Communications Team will give out agreed contact numbers for Members to the media, if requested, to enable the media to contact a Member direct in appropriate circumstances.

### *How to Deal with Conflicts of Interest*

As a Ward Member you may well have legitimate views that do not correspond to the Council's position. It can be okay to voice these via the media, but reference should be made to the Media Guidelines. If you do promote views through the media that conflict with those of the Council, make sure that the journalist knows that you are not speaking on behalf of the Council. You should also check with your political group office if you have one.

### *How to Use the Media to Promote Positive Stories*

There are a number of reasons why you may want to approach the media to communicate your messages. These are because

- by telling people about your work through the media, you will be more accountable
- it provides free publicity
- information conveyed in news stories has more credibility than advertising or that which you publish yourself
- you will be keeping up with the competition who are likely to be using the media.

### *What makes a news story?*

All stories need an angle or hook to make them newsworthy. Most angles have been used many times before. The main ones include:-

- human interest – one of the most powerful and common ways of bringing a story to life is to give it a human face. Try to find a local person who illustrates your story by explaining how the issue affects them

- local angle to a national story – national events and stories can be used by giving them a local angle.
- surveys and reports – newspapers love a story that can be backed up by reports or surveys to add to its authenticity. If you have done some research or carried out a survey, work it into your story and release it to the media.
- something new and novel – by definition anything that is new is news; a new campaign, new public building, new policy or procedure, new discovery or a new managing director could all be of interest to the media
- anniversaries and special dates – keep a watch for special days during the year. The media will be keen to cover things like your twentieth anniversary as a Member
- first ever, last ever – the first ever Muslim Mayor or the last ever committee meeting to take place in the town hall would both be newsworthy because of their unique status
- winners and losers – everyone loves a competition. Even the most obscure awards will get coverage
- celebrities – the media are obsessed with celebrities. If a celebrity addresses your meeting, backs your campaign or opens a local fete, it will not be difficult to get the media to cover it
- photo opportunities or pictures – a good photo can carry a story. If you provide a picture or an opportunity for one, you double your chances of your story being published

### *How do I get my story in the media?*

Journalists gather news from a number of sources including:

- contacts
- committee meetings and reports
- news releases

If you want to communicate through the media, all of these sources are likely to be important to you.

### *How to Develop Contacts with the Media*

One of the best ways of getting a journalist to write about an issue, and in particular, if you want them to write a feature rather than just cover a short news story, is through personal contact. If you develop a successful working relationship with the journalists covering your constituency, over time, they are more likely to be receptive to your ideas for stories and to approach you for comments when local issues arise.

**The Communications Team can supply details of contacts for the local and regional media.**

### *How to Write a Press Release*

A news release or press release is a circular sent to a journalist to generate media interest in a story or to react to an issue already being covered.

News releases should be written like news stories making them easy for journalists to use.

Given the high volume of news releases journalists receive, you should not expect everything you send the media to be published.

Once a news release has been issued, it is in the public domain and the journalist can deal with the story in any way he or she sees fit, including ignoring it completely. You do not have any say over the wording of the final article or who else the journalist will talk to while writing it. However, reporters are often busy and if given a good story that is well written, balanced and of interest to their audience they will usually pick it up.

News releases should only be issued when you have something to say. Most newsrooms receive dozens each day and they soon identify organisations and people who send them poor material.

### *Tips on writing and sending a news release*

**A guide to press release writing is available under the Communications section of the Council intranet ([link to insert](#)). A guide to local media deadlines is also available under the same section ([link to insert](#)). Training is also available. Contact the Learning & Development Officer on 582007 for further information.**

### *How to Deal with Bad News Stories*

One of the benefits of developing a relationship with the local media is that if a journalist is writing a story that could damage your reputation they will be more likely to approach you to put your point of view.

Unless you can 'kill' a potentially damaging story, because the journalist will write it whether or not you speak to them, it is almost always better to put across your point of view than not to respond. However, when responding to potentially damaging enquiries from journalists, you should stick to the following basic rules:

- check if you are the best person to comment. Should it be the lead Member, the leader or the Council's press office instead? Be wary of talking to a journalist if you don't have the full picture. Apart from getting it wrong and misleading people, you will simply become known as 'rent-a-quote'
- don't panic – the natural reaction to a journalist telling you that he or she is writing a story that could damage your reputation is to panic. Try not to
- what is the story? – do some digging. Ask the journalist about the story. Find out how much they know, what angle they are taking and who else they have talked to. Find out what the Council and your party's position is on the issue
- what is the deadline? – ask the journalist when they need your response by
- create a thinking space – never respond immediately. Tell the journalist that you will get back to them before their deadline. This will give you time to consider your options; talk to other people and if need be prepare a statement.
- stick to your statement – once you have decided on your statement, stick to it. Do not be drawn into further discussion or you might say something you hadn't intended to

### *How to Write a Statement*

Statements are usually issued in response to bad news stories. If you know that a potentially damaging story could break, you might want to write one in advance so that you are prepared when it does so.

Statements should not be long, detailed explanations. They are far more likely to get your message across effectively if they are robust, well argued and concise.

When writing a statement, you should stick to the following basic rules:

- establish the facts - if you don't know all the facts about the story, it is important that you establish them before responding. If you don't, you may cause further damage to you and your Council's reputation when the true story emerges
- never lie - if you do, you are bound to be found out
- apologise – if the issue merits an apology, make sure you express regret in your statement

- follow the 'RAC' principle – whenever possible, make sure your statement reassures the reader; says what action you are going to take to put things right and puts the issue in context

### **Training**

***The City Council runs a Member Training Programme alongside the one for Officers and Members are consulted periodically on what training needs they have. For further information please contact the Council's Learning and Development Officer or Members' Services .***

***If you have any questions arising from this document please contact the Head of Democratic Services or Communications Manager, who will try to assist.***

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# COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

## Special Council Meeting 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2006

### Report of Head of Democratic Services

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the options for the Special Council meeting taking place in the autumn.

This report is public

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Council consider the proposed issues for discussion at the Special Council Meeting and agree a topic and format for the meeting.
- (2) That a date, time and venue be set for the Special Council Meeting in 2006/07.

#### 1.0 Report

1.1 At its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2006 Council resolved :

“That one of the existing autumn meetings of Council, shall be selected by the Council Business Committee and re-designated as a ‘Special’ Council meeting for any of the following purposes :

- Consideration of a single topic
- Hearing of an external speaker
- Meeting in assembly or forum
- Consideration of a local, regional or national issue
- Or other purpose to be determined by the Council Business Committee

1.2 The Chairman of the Council Business Committee requested that all Councillors were consulted to hear their suggestions as to what could be considered at this Special meeting.

#### 2.0 Proposal Details

2.1 There are 2 potential dates in the Council timetable for 2006/07 which could be described as ‘Autumn’ – 27<sup>th</sup> September and 1<sup>st</sup> November.

2.2 All Members have been invited to put forward suggestions for issues to be considered at this Special Council meeting and the following have been received :-

- Local Government Bill – Double Devolution and Neighbourhood (including issues such as Morecambe Town Council and Parishing).
- Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreements.
- Diversity within Lancaster District- how are we doing in regard to service provision and how can we improve?
- Health and Well Being in our Community are our services delivering in accordance with health and beauty surrounds.
- How are we going to adapt our services and enhance our service provision for an increasing ageing population within our District.
- Litter – an Effective Strategy
- Recycling of Plastic
- Climate Change

2.3 The Committee is also requested to consider the format of this meeting. There are three styles of meetings set out below :

- (i) *A state of the district debate* – involving Councillors and also the public, other stakeholders and the media. This Council did hold such a debate in 2002 but in the first review of the Constitution it was not felt that it had been a success and it was dispensed with. Several other Councils who had done the same are now having second thoughts and experimenting with different formats. It can take the form of the Leader reporting on what has happened and what is about to happen, stimulating debate on a particular facet of the District, or it can be an integral part of the community planning process, inviting members of the public to join in debates on a series of topics on which representatives of outside organisations could be asked to make an introductory presentation, e.g. on local transport or health issues. This could also be combined with a session where the public can raise questions on other topics. Alternatively the event could be used to stage a “visioning”, “blue sky thinking” community forum style debate on what the area should be like in 5 or 10 years time. This would entail an open debate, without an agenda, allowing general consultation and engagement, with no decision at the end but a series of views which could inform future decisions.
- (ii) *Outside Speakers* – These can range from inviting speakers such as the Police, Health Board, PCT, a large private sector company such as BNFL, etc to give a presentation and answer questions or they can be invited to take part in a session of debate and exchange of views. They can be purely fact-finding missions or outside organisations can be invited to explore issues with the Council. Local MPs could be invited to share with the Council their views on local issues.
- (iii) *Single Issue meetings* - Council can be used as a forum for debate and deliberation on single issues – community safety, environmental sustainability, economic development, the activities and effectiveness of other public agencies for example. This has been done in the past by means of



holding an extraordinary meeting, as was the case for example last year to debate the M6 link road issue. It can also be seen as an extension of the current provision for motions on notice to be debated but could be improved by planning further ahead and advertising the issues to be debated allowing a greater opportunity for research and fact finding prior to the debate. Such debate could as now involve only councillors or it could provide a forum for the community and other agencies to debate important local issues alongside members. They can be used to make a decision on a particularly important issue or they can be used to formulate a council view to put pressure on another body. Involving external bodies or the general public can be a useful mechanism in raising public awareness but on the other hand councillors have a legitimate role as an elected body to debate different views and speak on behalf of the community.

### **3.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

#### **3.1 Date**

Last year, Council only met once in the Autumn on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2005. This meeting did not have a considerable amount of business on the Agenda even though Council had not met since July. Therefore either 27<sup>th</sup> September or 1<sup>st</sup> November would be suitable dates for the Special Council meeting depending on the topic and format agreed.

If a single topic was agreed upon, which would not require an outside speaker to attend and the meeting could be arranged 'in house', this could be arranged in a relatively short space of time for the September meeting.

If Members decide to opt for a larger, district debate type of meeting, this would obviously take longer to organise and therefore it would ideally take place in November.

Members are requested to consider which date the Special Council meeting is to be held.

#### **3.2 Topic**

Members are requested to consider the proposed issues set out in 2.2 above for consideration at the Special Council meeting or any other issues suggested at the meeting.

#### **3.3 Format**

There are several factors that need to be taken in to account when considering the format of the Special Council meeting. In considering the formats set out above in 2.3, Members need to consider stakeholders, outside speakers and the public interest this may generate.

Members also need to consider where this Special meeting of the Council will be held. If a large number of public are expected, it may be sensible to hold the meeting at Lancaster Town Hall to accommodate the numbers. Alternatively, the meeting could be held in a community building which may encourage more members of the public to attend.

Similarly, if public involvement is a priority then it might be preferable to hold the meeting in an evening rather than at 2.00 pm.

Members are requested to consider which format would best suit the topic that has been agreed.

**4 Conclusion**

**The views of the Mayor will be obtained prior to finalising any proposed agenda.**

<b>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b> (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)  No direct implications	
<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>  There are unlikely to be significant financial implications as a result of this report.  A change in venue may incur hire charges and there may be costs associated with external speakers. These can however be met from existing budgets for democratic representation.	
<b>SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS</b>  The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.	
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>  Any meeting must be held in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Constitution and Access to Information legislation.	
<b>MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS</b>  The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.	
<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>  Council Minutes	<b>Contact Officer:</b> Jenny Kay <b>Telephone:</b> 01524 582065 <b>E-mail:</b> jkay@lancaster.gov.uk