



## Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group

**26 June 2018**

Present: Councillor David Sheard  
Councillor Cathy Scott  
Councillor John Taylor  
Councillor Rob Walker  
Councillor John Lawson

Apologies: Councillor Robert Light  
Councillor Andrew Cooper

In Attendance: Carl Whistlecraft – Head of Democracy Service  
David Bundy – Policy Officer  
Vina Randhawa - Area and Neighbourhood Action  
Team Manager  
Wendy Blakeley – Head of Public Protection  
Phil Longworth – Health Policy Officer  
Sarah Durdin – Operational Manager  
Penny Bunker – Governance and Democratic Engagement  
Manager

### **1 Chair of Working Group**

The Working Group agreed that Councillor David Sheard would be Chair for the 2018-2019 Municipal Year.

### **2 Notes of Last Meeting**

The Notes of the Meeting held on 2 March 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

### **3 Progressing Priority Recommendations**

#### The Changing Councillor Role and How it is Supported

The Working Group considered a proposal regarding the recommendations prioritised at the previous meeting in respect of the changing Councillor role and how it is supported. Vina Randhawa, Area and Neighbourhood Action Team Manager attended to present the proposal.

The paper indicated that there were two main areas of focus for the proposals, firstly supporting Councillors in their Wards and secondly the changing Councillor role and the impact Councillors have. The report indicated that the aim was to understand the strategic and operational considerations for a redefined approach to supporting Councillors in their Wards. This would include direct support from a Democracy Service perspective but more importantly from the wider Council. The suggested approach was;

- To undertake face to face Ward – based engagement with all Councillors to better understand Ward based support aspirations and needs;
- To undertake detailed engagement with key officers to understand the extent of the current offer and the scope for changing the offer with regard to the findings of the Ward based engagement;
- To undertake parallel desktop with face to face research to understand the approaches adopted by other Authorities in this context;
- To present finding the recommendation to the Cross Party Working Group with a view to determining a way forward by September/October 2018

In considering this proposed approach it was suggested that within some Wards some Councillors were more vocal than others and it was important to ensure that there was an opportunity to meet Councillors individually should this be seen as the best approach.

The idea of a survey or questionnaire option was explored and in light of previous high level of response it was agreed that this should be an additional option and could be used to 'mop up' those Councillors who were unable to meet with Officers.

In respect of the Councillor role and the impact they have, this would involve producing a revised role profile for Kirklees Councillor and developing and communicating performance information that demonstrates to citizens the impact that a Councillor is having.

The suggested approach was:

- A Cross Party Group of Councillors undertake a time limited piece of work which incorporates the following phases:
  - Consideration of relevant information gathered by the Democracy Commission to use as a base for informing next stage of work;
  - Using a workshop approach to develop a draft role profile for a Kirklees Ward Councillor and proposals for the ways in which Councillor impact can be captured and shared with Kirklees citizens;
  - Produce a report with findings and recommendations to the Cross Party Working Group for consideration in September/October 2018

The Working Group supported the proposals and emphasised the need to look for volunteers to be part of the Working Group and those who wish to contribute. Councillor Scott suggested that the existing Cross Party Working Group which had been looking at technology for Councillors might be retained and added to with other volunteers.

There followed a more detailed discussion on the use of Councillor role profiles and how it should not be a one size fits all approach. It was agreed that the current profile was out of date but its replacement should be seen as inclusive rather than prescriptive in its approach. The situation should be avoided whereby Councillors are perceived as developing their own role profile in isolation. The role profile was a baseline that needed to be built on to reflect the role moving forward. It could also be used for a range of purposes including a tool for Political Groups to recruit potential candidates.

The Working Group continued to discuss the introduction of performance indicators and accepted that they would differ in different parts of the Borough rather than being standardised. It was suggested that there might be a public contribution to what they saw the role of Councillors as being which could feed into a first draft of a revised role profile.

The Working Group agreed that each piece of work would have a Lead Working Group Councillor who could be a touchstone outside of formal meetings. It was agreed that Councillor John Taylor and Councillor Cathy Scott would share the lead for the changing Councillor role work stream.

#### **AGREED**

(1) That the Working Group sign off the objectives and proposed approach for undertaking the changing Councillor role work stream in the sequence and timeframes set out in the report.

(2) That Councillor John Taylor and Councillor Cathy Scott take a strategic lead responsibility for this area of work.

(3) That members of the existing Cross Party IT Working Group be asked if they wish to continue as a Working Group for the purposes of the tasks within this objective.

(4) That communications arising from the decisions of the Working Group be coordinated to advise all Councillors of how they can contribute to the work.

#### **4 Putting the Councillor at the Heart of the Organisation**

Carl Whistlecraft, Head of Democracy and members of the Programme Team provided an update on recent work to explore how Councillors are put at the Heart of the Organisation. Workshops had been held with groups of Councillors, Senior Managers and Middle Managers to gather their views about their experience in being a Councillor within Kirklees Council or being an officer working with Councillors. The workshops had been successful and findings were being collated to feed into a final session on 10 July which would bring all the groups together. A number of themes had emerged and the final workshop would ask those present to consider what the Council should do about it. Concrete proposals would be feedback to Executive Team and the Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group for discussion.

Officers commented on the level of enthusiasm amongst Councillors and officers that we could do better than we currently did. Everybody was very

supportive of each other's roles and wanted to identify shared outcomes and what barriers needed to be removed to make things better.

Those who attended recognised that a lot of officers had limited engagement with Councillors and there was a need for officers to come and explain their roles but equally to understand Councillors roles. The issue of training and development to understand roles had also been identified and the need to refresh the training and continue to be clear about the differing roles and relationships. It was suggested that as part of research Councillors could be asked to refer one good case of working effectively with Officers but also highlight what worked least well.

## **5 Any Other Business**

There followed a brief discussion on arrangements for the quarterly Question Time events, with the next one being held on 16 July 2018. It has been suggested that moving forward a non-Council member of the Panel might be appropriate, for example a third sector representative. At the previous meeting a Member of the Youth Council had also sat on the Panel. Those present supported the idea of having four Councillors plus one person drawn from another area.

It was suggested that the Councillors should not solely look third sector for representation perhaps old people or carers would be an option. It was also suggested that it was important to look at the gender balance of the Panel as it had seemed a little male dominated previously.

**AGREED** – That, moving forward, quarterly Question Time events should comprise of four Councillors and one external Panel Member.

## **6 Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Working Group would take place on Wednesday 18 July 2018 at 10.00am in Civic Centre 3, Huddersfield.