



**Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group –
Wednesday 29 August 2018**

Putting the Councillor at the heart of the organisation

Brief background

Part of the Democracy Commission's [Growing a stronger local democracy](#) report concentrates on the importance of the relationship between officers and councillors. The most relevant of the Commission's recommendations is:

“Kirklees Council should promote the role of Councillors to staff members in a structured and ongoing way, as part of wider cultural changes both with the Council and in our communities. Our staff should understand the importance of the Councillor role and how it is an invaluable asset as part of changing and redesigning services.”

Our Chief Executive has also set out her priority to place councillors at the heart of the organisation.

In light of this, we have begun work that will help us to understand the context, with a view to sowing the seeds of cultural change.

Update since the last meeting

At the last meeting the Working Group went through the findings of the workshop exercises and made the following observations:

- The specific issues relating to Overview and Scrutiny (raised earlier in the engagement process) must not get lost or overlooked.
- It is crucial that there is a cultural change whereby staff at different levels throughout the organisation are given the permission and opportunities to work with councillors. This is how meaningful and effective relationships will develop.
- As part of such a culture change staff must be supported to have the knowledge, tools and confidence to work with councillors. We cannot expect them to have political awareness, exercise judgement and employ discretion without supporting them to develop such skills.

- Councillors have an important role in making that culture change work. Poor councillor behaviour damages the relationship and tars all councillors with the same brush. Current rules, processes and sanctions must be used to address such behaviours.
- Officers need to engage with councillors when they are working in their Wards. Councillors have invaluable knowledge and insight which can contribute to problem solving and redesigning services. This is not currently utilised.
- There needs to be more opportunities for councillors to meet officers and work with services.
- To facilitate change it will be important to capture and share stories. It helps to show what good looks like and supports learning in a safe and supportive way.

The above mentioned points were used as a basis for the Working Group to consider the specific actions that they would wish to see progressed. Officers from the Programme Team were also asked to undertake a similar exercise. The collated results of that exercise is attached at **Appendix 1**.

The outcomes of this process were reported to Kirklees Council's Executive Team on Tuesday 31 July 2018. At that meeting, Executive Team made these comments:

- The officers and councillors involved in the workshops should be thanked.
- Our Executive Team supported the importance of giving "permission" for officers to routinely liaise and interact with councillors. There was a recognition that this should be done in a managed and supported way in order to ensure that officers are confident and competent to work effectively with councillors. Managing instances where councillors behave badly should form part of this.
- Building on this, it is therefore important to ensure that effective developmental support is in place for officers in the context of the Council's People Strategy.
- All priority actions have Executive Team's full support.
- In order to maintain momentum it is important to ensure that priority actions are included as part of a corporate campaign that facilitates the culture change we are trying to achieve.

Picking up on the last point officers have subsequently undertaken work to develop a campaign proposal which it is proposed will provide the framework for delivering against priority actions. This is attached at **Appendix 2** for consideration and comment.

Recommendation

The Cross Party Working Group are asked to:

- Consider and comment on the feedback from Executive Team.
- Consider the proposed approach to communication and engagement set out at Appendix 2 with a view to agreeing it as a basis for planning and delivering future work.

Appendix 1

Contacting officers

Priority actions:

- Improve the quality of information on People Finder. It should be kept up to date. This should include specific references where officers work in designated Wards.
- Staff who work in a Ward or neighbourhood should make themselves known to councillors from the outset.

Meeting and working together

Priority actions:

- Invite councillors to work with officers to problem-solve Ward issues (Ward Solution Meetings) and be involved in Ward-based service initiatives.
- Capture stories where joint working between councillors and officers has been successful.
- Senior officers should ensure that their officers are supported / have permission to communicate with Ward councillors. Reduce the hierarchy
- Councillors should be more challenging of some of the behaviours of other councillors within their group.
- “Bring Your Councillor to Work Day”.
- Take opportunities to do “joint” casework.
- Develop a Fresher’s Fair where councillors can drop in and meet different officers and services.
- Councillors understand their communities, ask them for advice and insight.
- Officers should attend Council or Cabinet meetings as part of their development.
- Hold themed lunch time briefings for councillors and staff.
- Staff and Cllrs to volunteer a day working in the ward with a voluntary organisation / community group on a ward based task.

Information and support for councillors

Priority actions:

- Bite size / right size information about Wards – online and through direct contact. A “timely script” on key community issues.

Learning and development

Priority actions:

- Reinforce the officer / councillor protocol as part of induction and on an ongoing basis.
- Induction for new staff should incorporate meeting with councillors. Opportunities to learn and bond together.
- Existing “Working in a Political Environment” training needs promoting.
- Officers need to understand the “basic rules” of working with councillors.
- All management training should include political awareness and officers and councillors working together.