Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group

Report Title: Putting Councillors at the Heart of the Organisation

1.   Background and Context

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.

2.   Working Group Expectations and Progress Made

The Working Group commissioned officers to carry out a number of workshop sessions, one with Councillors, one with middle managers and one with senior managers.

The sessions were attended as follows:

- Councillors (one session in North Kirklees and one session in South Kirklees) – 19 attendees
- Middle Managers – 41 attendees
- Senior Managers – 30 attendees

and were held to begin to understand officer and Councillor perspectives in some key areas and to identify some key areas of difference and some potential areas of focus for our work.

Please see report attached at Appendix 1.

Following these workshops, the findings were assessed and the Working Group made a number of observations. These observations were used by both the Working Group and the Programme Team to identify a number of priority actions resulting from the workshops.

The priority actions were identified and these were presented to Kirklees Council's Executive Team who made a number of comments relating to the priority recommendations including that all priority actions had the team's full support.

The priority actions were grouped into these specific areas:

- Contacting Officers;
- Meeting and working together;
- Information and support for Councillors;
- Learning and development.

A Communications and Engagement approach was then developed, identifying "what we'll focus on", what we'll do" and what we'll achieve, along with a timeline of activities.

Please see report attached at Appendix 2.

A number of practical opportunities for Councillors and officers to work together and develop a shared understanding of their roles have been developed, including:

- A programme of Councillor/officer shadowing;
- New Councillor Induction and development sessions;
- Working in a political environment training, co-delivered with Councillors to 633 staff so far;
- Launch of the online Councillor Account, incorporating an integrated casework management system;
- Placing Councillors at the heart of planning and delivering Place Based engagement;

Activities have also taken place as part of the Communications and Engagement approach.

Please see report attached at Appendix 3.

Campaign burst#3 starts in October (part of our Local Democracy Week programme).

3.   Next Steps and Issues to Consider

The Working Group is asked to note the next priority actions to be developed:

- Staff and Cllrs to volunteer a day working in the ward with a voluntary organisation / community group on a ward based task.

- Develop a Fresher's Fair where councillors can drop in and meet different officers and services.

- Officers should attend Council or Cabinet meetings as part of their development (to be included as part of a future campaign burst).

- Reinforce the officer / councillor protocol as part of induction and on an ongoing basis – to be discussed at the meeting on 11th November.

The Working Group is also asked to consider a risk that has been identified:

- There was a very low response from the organisation to the "Inviting Councillors In" activity. Views are sought from the Working Group about how to address this.

Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group – Wednesday 18 July 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."

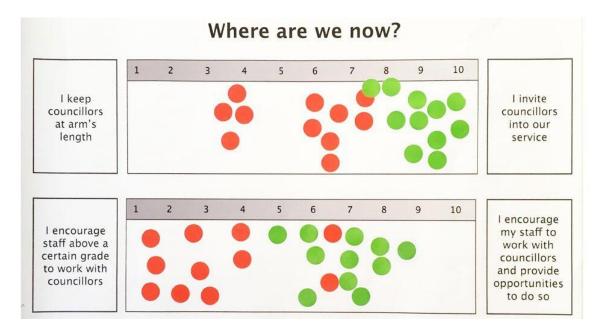Our Chief Executive has also set out her priority to place councillors at the heart of the organisation.

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.

What we have done (so far)

We have held a number of workshop sessions with a range of participants:

- Councillors (one session in North Kirklees, one in the South) – 19 attendees
- Senior Managers – 41 attendees
- Middle Managers – 30 attendees

The purpose of the sessions was to begin to understand officer and councillor perspectives in some key areas, in order to be clear about where we are starting from. We wanted to identify some key areas of difference and some potential areas of focus for our work. We used a scenario based approach, where we asked officers and councillors to identify "where we are today" (with a red dot) and "where we want to be" (with a green dot). We also asked participants to comment on the challenges we might face in getting to where we want to be in the future.

Where are we now?

We are sharing our interim analysis of the findings from this process (**Appendix 1**), which we used to inform our final joint workshop session.

The final workshop session brought together 91 councillors and officers into 8 mixed workshop groups. Each group was asked to focus on the following questions and identify priority actions:

- How could we realistically keep councillors informed about what is happening in their Wards?
- How could we realistically develop stronger working relationships between councillors and staff across the organisation?
- How could we enable councillors to work closer with staff, particularly at a more operational level in their Wards?
- How could we help and support staff to work confidently with councillors?

The workshop discussions generated a wide range of suggestions and observations, all of which we captured in detail. We are sharing a first attempt at summarising and collating the workshop outcomes (**Appendix 2**).

Recommendation and next steps

The Cross Party Working Group are asked to:

- Consider the findings of the workshops (Appendix 1 & Appendix 2).
- Provide initial views as to the priorities and issues (Appendix 1).
- Make specific recommendations to Kirklees Council's Executive Team.

The outcome will be reported to the Executive Team of Kirklees Council at their meeting on 31 July 2018 with a view to finalising a detailed action plan for delivering future work. This will be reported back to the next meeting of the Democracy Commission Working Group on 29 August 2018.

Findings from the first series of workshops

Looking at an overview of the session outcomes and the comments made by our participants, we have some general observations to share. These are:

- We found a shared enthusiasm amongst our participants to improve the working relationships between councillors and officers.

- Officers are generally more positive than councillors in terms of where we are starting from.

- Councillors are more pessimistic and this is particularly the case with councillors in North Kirklees, who consistently registered low scores on the majority of the scenarios.

- In one area (engaging with scrutiny) there is, broadly, a shared view in terms of both councillors and officers seeing this as a low starting point with much scope for improvement.

- Councillors think that officers do a good job and they want this to be recognised and communicated.

- There is a higher level of concern from councillors in terms of working effectively with officers in their wards and influencing the services in their ward. This is shared by middle managers, although they are mindful of the barriers to improving this issue.

- Councillors want more contact with officers at a more operational level, and they see senior officers as a barrier to this happening.

- This project must move at pace and result in some practical changes – no more talking.

We are also sharing some more detailed analysis, under three broad themes:

1. The relationship between councillors, management and staff
2. Ward based information, decisions and services
3. Governance and decision making

The relationship between councillors, management and staff

A number of the scenarios explored councillor and officer perspectives and attitudes towards each other. These relate to ways of working, accessibility, information sharing, engagement and collaborative working. Our headline findings are:

- Officers are generally more optimistic than councillors with regards to the current state of the relationship between the two.

- Councillors do not feel that officers see them as someone who can add value. They feel they are seen as more of an irritant than an asset.

- Councillors feel that officers do not understand their role and are not encouraged to think about them. This is a view shared by middle managers. Staff training and development is an issue that should be addressed.

- Councillors are frustrated by the lack of opportunities to meet and work with front-line operational staff. Councillors view senior officers as a barrier to such contact. This view is partly shared by middle managers, who want to change this situation but are unsure as to how best do something about it in light of some of the constraints. A number of councillors and middle managers said that Councillor Enquiries is a barrier to developing such relationships.

- Councillor insight is seen by both officers and councillors as being important, although there is shared acknowledgement that this insight is not fully sought out and utilised. This is particularly the case at ward level, which is explained from an officer perspective by having fewer opportunities to engage and fewer resources to carry out this level of activity.

- Councillors generally believe that officers tell them what they think they need to know. This is partly accepted by officers as being the case. Middle managers are less confident that this situation is likely to change, particularly at a ward level.

- Senior officers and middle managers both feel that officer perceptions of councillors have been damaged by having bad experiences with some councillors in the past. This means that they are less likely to mention councillors to their staff. Playing politics is an issue.

What senior managers said

"I often don't mention councillors when I am discussing strategic ideas, only operational."

"I mention councillors regularly but have been scarred by bad experiences."

"It's not always clear what role or benefit councillors play."

"It's important to understand the role of councillors in a bureaucratic organisation."

"It is important to get to know councillors individually and what makes them tick or drives them."

"Councillors sometimes abuse power & ask for information that is politically motivated."

"We need to increase trust from all parties."

"Officers can become torn between opposing political perspectives."

"Not all staff understand the role of councillor or see working with them as part of their role."

"The real challenge is engaging with councillors on a trust basis – this will require a culture shift."

What middle managers said

"We are positive with councillors who want to engage – but there are some councillors who it is really difficult to engage with. Some are incredibly difficult to work with."

"We broadly tell councillors when they come asking rather than proactively telling them – due to time, culture in the team."

"There is a very fine balance in terms of keeping councillors informed. Some bad experiences result in staff being over cautious about communicating with councillors."

"Engagement with councillors shouldn't be hierarchical – it feels like that at times."

"In terms of relationships the pendulum swings too far between being a relationship between Cabinet & senior officers and not enough between ward councillors & junior officers."

"Councillors can help translate technical issues to communities and help engage."

"Councillors 'play politics' with officers."

"Portfolio leads are key to talk to for decisions – we don't have the resources to talk to all councillors."

"It feels like we are doing 'to' councillors at the moment, not 'with' – there are reasons but we need to move from this."

"We're not selling enough to our staff the importance of role of councillors."

"Where you are and what service you are in influences contact with councillors."

"They (councillors) can ignore intelligence and evidence in favour of personal preferences. That's an irritant."

"It is important that officers get to know councillors. It helps with accepting what can be difficult decisions".

"Some services don't feel they have permission to engage with councillors from senior managers."

"There has been a change in communication – less direct contact, depersonalised."

"Councillors used to appreciate having contact with staff. Now we get complaints that it's hard to talk to staff."

"There has been a decline in opportunities for officers to meet councillors in safer environments to develop experience."

"We are steered to put everything through Councillor Enquiries – which is a yo-yo – and makes extra work. It was better before."

What councillors said in the South Kirklees session

"Staff need better listening skills. There is not enough flexibility to respond to councillor or community issues"

"Councillor Enquiries means I don't know who is dealing with issues. It takes time for response (too slow). I want relationships with officers directly"

"It's the inconsistency. Some are good (officers and systems) other less so. How do we gain consistency?"

"Managers are wary of councillors talking to front line staff. Managers turn up if councillors want to talk to staff. e.g. ward meetings. (This is a huge waste of resources)."

"It prevents us being more integrated with community-based staff. It stifles the staff ability to be creative."

"Turning up with a manager can 'kill the flow' and the creativity. I don't want managers, I need ground level people."

"We don't think staff are encouraged to think about councillors."

"Staff are only given limited interactions with councillors and small number of senior officers."

"Some managers seem to lack confidence in allowing more specialist staff to speak to councillors. Status? Self-esteem?"

"Staff engage with the "what" and not the "how". They engage at strategic level but not at operational ground level."

"They talk to us at the start but it is not engagement. Then it goes quiet. Nothing happens, no updates, but officers will be back when complaints come in."

"It is a great cause of frustration when frontline actual delivery doesn't reflect what has been strategically changed and decided on."

"Content of intelligence changes all the time. Officers should access ward knowledge via councillors. Needs a balance of both - join then together."

"I don't know who is dealing with my issues anymore."

"It's alright managers saying they encourage staff to work with councillors but there is a level where they don't. Most staff don't have a clue who councillors are."

What councillors said in the North Kirklees session

"Councillors want named officers and contacts. The Councillor Enquiries system keeps the situation at arm's length. Faceless and not personal."

"Finding the officers is difficult, once you get to know them they are great."

"We need a verbal communication channel with officers."

"We need opportunities for members and officers to mix and interact."

"Senior Management used to be more relaxed about more junior officers talking to councillors. Now they are much more controlling."

"Staff don't understand what councillors do."

"Staff see councillors as a threat."

"Ticking the box regarding consultation when in reality we are not consulted until the last minute."

"Officers should see councillors as holders of alternative solutions."

"It is important to pass back to staff that they are valued. The message needs to go to staff how much councillors value them."

"Why don't managers use councillors for staff briefings?"

Ward based information, decisions and services

A number of the scenarios explored engagement, dialogue and information sharing with councillors at a ward level. Our headline findings are:

- Current councillor engagement in the planning and delivery of ward based services is low. There is a high level of councillor negativity in this area. There is a shared aspiration by officers and councillors to improve this, although officers are not sure how best to go about it. Participants said that the lack of mechanisms or processes for this to happen is an issue.

- Councillors have a very strong focus and interest in place based services.

- Awareness of what services are delivered in their wards (and what is happening in their wards) is important to councillors. Information flow and ongoing engagement needs to improve. Councillors believe they find out about things too late and are therefore unable to influence what happens.

- There is some difference between officers and councillors in terms of the value that councillor insight brings to the development and delivery of place based services. Currently officers acknowledge that their focus is on their technical knowledge, with a lower level aspiration to move towards greater use of councillor insight.

What senior managers said

"We don't necessarily tell them at all (about changes to ward based services). We do it well for the big stuff but ward based stuff less so."

"Councillor views are too narrow to be useful."

"Sometimes their (councillor) insight is narrow – not representative of local people."

What middle managers said

"Councillor relationships have gone backwards with the loss of ward meetings."

"Not informing ward councillors can 'blow up in our faces'. It's a delicate balance but whose responsibility is it to brief councillors?"

"We have no mechanisms to engage with ward councillors (we are isolated from them) so rely on technical data."

"There is no structure to support and engage with all 69 councillors – we can't do it anymore – not with current resources."

"Service redesign is often done through the Cabinet process. There is limited involvement with ward councillors."

What councillors said in the South Kirklees session

"Some directorates are good, some not. Schools good. Highways patchy. There is inconsistency."

"Staff don't tell me (about changes to ward based services)."

"I gave a list of services I wanted to go to and meet and see 'daily business' – and it took a whole year to sort – why so long?"

What councillors said in the North Kirklees session

"Too much comes out to the Examiner before councillors are informed."

"Public messaging is often before messaging to councillors."

"There must be opportunities for councillors to input local viewpoints in good time."

"Staff need to understand the potential of member insight."

Governance and decision making

Two of the scenarios specifically focussed on governance and decision making, with a particular emphasis on Cabinet and Scrutiny. Our headline findings are:

- Attitudes and perceptions in terms of Scrutiny start from a low point for both officers and councillors. Early and effective officer engagement and the quality and timeliness of information are key issues. Middle managers are less confident of this situation improving, compared to senior managers.

- Councillors see the tabling of reports and poor quality of information as a greater issue than officers do. This may be a process or systems issue, but there is a perception that this is not the sole cause.

- Both officers and councillors indicate that the quality and timeliness of information for Cabinet is less of an issue than it is for Scrutiny. Generally officers are more confident and optimistic in terms of the relationship with Cabinet, compared to the relationship with Scrutiny.

What senior managers said

"Some things happen too quickly for the formal process."

"No clear rules that are captured about time lines for information or reports to Cabinet Members etc."

"I wasn't clear that I could approach scrutiny."

"Language is a challenge – "called-in", "witness" – confrontational or constructive."

"It depends on the sensitivity of the issue and the required depth of engagement."

"Clarity about the role of scrutiny and it being more political."

"Capacity of scrutiny to deal with the 'ask'."

What middle managers said

"A need for councillors to understand what is appropriate information and confidential information."

"I can't always tell them due to the sensitive nature of some information and councillors don't like that i.e. not knowing."

"I only engage with Scrutiny when I get the dreaded email."

"Scrutiny is a clunky, long and drawn out process. It could be simpler."

"There's not an understanding of the role of Scrutiny, there's no manual."

"There is a fear of Scrutiny. We are not encouraged to engage, it tends to be at senior level."

"I would like to engage with Scrutiny at middle or junior level but the senior team block this."

What councillors said in the South Kirklees session

"Tabled papers that are complicated are unacceptable. I don't know if timescales are realistic."

"Reports are too brief or high level e.g. scrutiny. If we need to scrutinise we need enough detail in advance. NO verbal reports."

"Officers should be comfortable with some tension around scrutiny."

"Staff rely on quantitative stats and not qualitative data. They miss out on the essence and finer nuances of the issue."

What councillors said in the North Kirklees session

"I would like to strengthen pre-decision scrutiny. We do not use it enough."

"Scrutiny shouldn't be seen as 'the enemy'."

"We need discussions not presentations."

"We need bitesize, right size information."

Actions and suggestions from the final workshop

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. • Named officer contacts for handling queries.	**Other suggestions:** • Staff who work in a Ward or neighbourhood should make themselves known to councillors from the outset. • Pen portraits of councillors and officers as a tool for developing a shared understanding. • Services should share their officer structures and contacts (a simple who does what).

Meeting and working together	
Priority actions: • Routine Ward / site visits / Ward walkabouts with officers on a quarterly basis (would need rota approach to be manageable). • 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.	**Other suggestions:** • A general wish for more joint officer and councillor sessions. • There were a range of comments relating to the current approach to councillor enquiries which is a barrier to councillors developing relationships with officers. • Use the service redesign / peer review model when inviting councillors in to see what services do. • Create champions for services amongst councillors. • Officers should check the council calendar of meetings when thinking about inviting councillors or setting up meetings.

Meeting and working together (continued)

Priority actions:

- Councillors should be more challenging of some of the behaviours of other councillors within their group.
- Quarterly Ward-based meetings between councillors and officers.
- Explore the use of virtual technology to make it easier for officers to engage with councillors.
- "Bring Your Councillor to Work Day".
- Use planned events as an opportunity for councillors and officers to get together on a more routine basis.
- Take opportunities to do "joint" casework.
- Encourage officers to consider "What can a councillor do for you?" Councillors as a resource for officers.
- Councillors invited into services and team meetings. Hold service open days for councillors.
- Provide a more tailored service – officers to know more about Wards and the personalities of councillors.
- Develop a Fresher's Fair where councillors can drop in and meet different officers and services.
- Councillors understand their communities, as them for advice and insight.
- Increase the opportunities for shadowing councillors in their Wards.
- Spotlight on a service or introduction to a service newsletter.
- Officers should attend Council or Cabinet meetings as part of their development.
- Cabinet portfolio holders should visit services and have an open invitation to other councillors to join them.
- Forums for discussion and ideas involving officers, councillors and partners.
- 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 as ward based task.

Other suggestions:

- Officers should attend the election count to experience democracy in action.

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.
- Develop Ward based social media platforms where councillors can access up to date information about their Wards than can be shared with constituents.
- Monthly Ward-based newsletter / regular information of forthcoming activity, initiatives and events.
- Introduce the new casework management system and end legacy systems.
- Request the views and inputs from councillors earlier.
- Put timescales to reference numbers e.g. how long will it take to… fix a pot hole?
- Develop a "menu of opportunities" to allow councillors to opt into the information they want to receive. This could be updated annually.
- Councillors should know which officers are working in their Wards and when.
- Have a key officer conduit (who has knowledge of the area, councillors and services) for getting information to councillors.
- Senior officers should be contactable by councillors any time to discuss urgent issues and vice versa.
- Provide a "family tree" organisation structure for all councillors and officers.
- Services host annual open days.
- Emails from services (this could be co-ordinated) in respect of what is happening in Wards.
- Text councillors to ensure they have facts to stop local misconceptions.

Other suggestions:

- Provision of more Ward-based intelligence.
- Produce monthly success stories for Ward councillors.
- Look at how the Councillor Account can be used as a means of providing updates.
- Use technology to drip-feed information to councillors e.g. Kompass.
- Identify which services are of a higher priority for regular contact and communications with councillors.
- Provide more meaningful Ward profiles / insights.
- Services should link into existing Ward arrangements e.g. Ward Forums, School Community Hubs.
- Ward Facebook group.

Learning and development

Priority actions:	**Other suggestions:**
- Induction for new staff should incorporate meeting with councillors. Opportunities to learn and bond together. - Staff development programme for all new starters at all levels. - Existing "Working in a Political Environment" training needs promoting. - Democracy Service officers who are experienced and skilled in working with councillors should be champions who offer advice and guidance. - Simple guidance for officers about the best ways to communicate with councillors. - Reinforce the officer / councillor protocol as part of induction and on an ongoing basis. - Provide training and experiences for younger / less experienced officers e.g. senior officers taking them to meetings and encouraging shadowing. - Enhance the councillor wall chart with small biographies of each councillor – humanise them.	- Ensure councillor role profiles are clear and used as part of induction. - Meetings with key Ward-based officers and teams as part of new councillor induction. - Officers need to understand the "basic rules" of working with councillors. 1-1 discussions and appraisals should include discussions about officers and councillors working together. - All management training should include political awareness and officers and councillors working together. - Create and promote a guide for officers to nurture political awareness and confidence.

**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.

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.

Putting Councillors at the heart of what we do

Communications and engagement approach

We're aiming to sow the seeds of cultural change in our organisation, by putting councillors at the heart of what we do. Councillors have a unique and constant role in connecting us to our communities. Strong councillors are at the centre of local networks and help us to grow our relationships with our citizens.

The Democracy Commission's work has shown that the valuable role of councillor is often misunderstood, by both our citizens and our staff. Yet through our most recent work we have also found a shared enthusiasm amongst councillors and officers to improve working relationships. Above all, we've heard a desire to create more trust.

Our approach is about recognising the essential role of councillors in our organisation and in our neighbourhoods, about creating stronger relationships, and about encouraging shared activities that will have meaningful outcomes for our citizens. It's a key part of our work to grow a stronger local democracy, from the ground up.

What we'll focus on

We're developing our communications & engagement activities around 3 key ideas:

People – *Personal and Political*

Trust grows from getting to know each other. We're going to tell personal stories online and actively encourage more interaction between our councillors and staff. Confidence grows from understanding. We're going to promote opportunities for staff to learn about working with councillors and change attitudes to doing this.

Places – *Presence and Pulse*

We're going to recognise the value of councillors as representatives of our local places – being present in their wards and being able to share insight with both citizens and officers. Together we can improve our ward-based working. We can also improve the flows of local information that councillors are at the centre of.

Partnership – *Practical and Productive*

We're going to create more practical opportunities for councillors and officers to collaborate. We must be able to demonstrate meaningful results for our citizens. We'll also promote successful work with our partners and amongst the wider local government community. This means being ambitious and working in the open.

What we'll do

We will develop new activities and approaches in direct response to the issues and potential actions identified by councillors and managers in our workshops. As a priority, we will respond to those actions highlighted by the Democracy Commission Working Group and Programme Team.

Working closely with councillors to develop relevant content

Whilst some of our existing content is already helping to raise the profile of the councillor role, we now need to bring these elements together into a coherent and prominent campaign, and to refine our approach to new content. So we will create:

- **A series of thought-provoking campaign bursts** with custom artwork that will challenge the way our staff currently think about working with councillors. We'll use these to encourage take-up of training and advice. *[Hero content]*

- **A rolling programme of storytelling content** – blogs, videos, live tweets and imagery. This will help engage our staff by introducing the people who are our councillors, rather than just the role. We will give clear examples of how to work effectively with councillors, and encouragement to do it. *[Hub content]*

- **New promotion of opportunities to learn the basics** about working with councillors, to meet and to work together, along with bitesize advice and reassurance, including snippets from our protocols. *[Help content]*

> *Hero content* is occasional, high-impact content that creates an emotional response.
>
> *Hub content* is about telling stories – it's what keeps people coming back.
>
> *Help content* is useful information that we know people are looking for day-to-day.

Improving our methods of communicating with councillors

We need to recognise the shift towards supporting councillors in their wards and make sure that we have effective methods of communication in place. We should:

- Review our current communications channels and approaches.
- Pilot an approach to sharing timely, bitesize information on ward-level issues.
- Test an approach to encouraging staff to ask for insight from councillors.
- Promote existing tools that can help when used well, such as People Finder.

There are also opportunities to develop our participants' ideas about using ward-level social media as part of the "Local democracy in a networked society" elements of the wider Democracy Commission work programme.

Encouraging openness in the way we work with councillors

We know that our staff can be fearful of working with councillors. Many think that councillors only get involved when something has gone wrong, and officers say they do not feel confident talking to councillors. We've also learned that Scrutiny is seen as particularly challenging. Making our work together more open will help us to change those perceptions. Some of the ways we can start doing this are:

- Share some of our collaborative work as it happens (for example, via live social media coverage), so that working with councillors begins to feel like a more open process, and other officers are encouraged to participate.
- Create and share a concise video introduction, explaining how Scrutiny works.
- Share video interviews with Scrutiny panel members and officers who have worked with Scrutiny, describing their journey in an honest and open way.

Sharing our work locally, regionally and nationally

We want to be known as the council that has put councillors at its heart, so we should make the most of opportunities to highlight our joint work. We can:

- Feature events and activities as part of Local Democracy Week (October), UK Parliament Week (November) and our New Councillor Induction (May).
- Grow awareness as part of the Democracy Commission work programme.
- Work towards wider promotion of our approach with other councils. We should work with one or more of our national partners to do this.

What we'll achieve

Our work will contribute to these agreed outcomes of the Democracy Commission:

> *"Councillors have the confidence, skills, support and capacity to lead the changing relationship between the council and local citizens. They are placed at the heart of the Council."*
>
> *"The councillor role is clear, widely communicated and universally understood."*

Timeline of activities

Content	Date	Key themes
Campaign burst #1	October 2018	People
Campaign burst #2	To confirm	People, Places
Campaign burst #3	To confirm	People, Partnership
Storytelling content	Ongoing	People
Help content	Autumn 2018 onwards	Partnership
Improving methods	**Date**	**Key themes**
Review channels & approaches	September 2018	Places, Partnership
Ward-level bitesize info pilot	To confirm	Places
Test encouraging Cllr insight	To confirm	Places, Partnership
Promote existing tools	Autumn 2018 onwards	Partnership
Encouraging openness	**Date**	**Key themes**
Coverage of collaborative work	Ongoing	Partnership
Video: intro to Scrutiny	September 2018	Partnership
Video: working with Scrutiny	October 2018	Partnership
Sharing our work	**Date**	**Key themes**
Local Democracy Week	October 2018	People, Places, Partnership
UK Parliament Week	November 2018	People, Places, Partnership
New Councillor induction	May 2019	People
Democracy work programme	Ongoing	People, Places, Partnership
National promotion	Autumn 2019	Partnership

Putting councillors at the heart of what we do
Engagement & communications activities, September 2019

1. Content

Campaign burst #1 - Face to face with our councillors and officers
We developed a video campaign aimed at highlighting our common purpose and helping officers to feel more confident about working with councillors. Campaign content was shared on the Intranet homepage, on Jacqui's blog, in Our Week, in the Democracy in Kirklees email bulletin, on twitter and on YouTube.

Face to face with our councillors and officers (Democracy blog)
http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/face-to-face-with-our-councillors-and-officers/

Face to face with our councillors (Jacqui's blog)
https://intranet.kirklees.gov.uk/Blogs/Management/Messages-from-Jacqui/October-2018/Face-to-face-with-our-councillors.aspx

Date: October 2018
Key themes: people

Campaign burst #2 - Inviting councillors in
We told the story of how one council service have welcomed councillors by organising a practical and informative tour, enabling councillors to support people in their wards, and to get to know more of our staff. Campaign content was shared on the Intranet News, in a guest blog by Rachel, in Our Week, on twitter and on YouTube.

Inviting our councillors in (Democracy blog)
http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/inviting-our-councillors-in/

Welcoming councillors by Rachel Spencer-Henshall (Take-over blog)
https://intranet.kirklees.gov.uk/Blogs/Management/Messages-from-Jacqui/July-2019/Take-over-blog-Welcoming-councillors-by-Rachel-Spe.aspx

Date: July 2019
Key themes: people, places

Campaign burst #3
planned
Date: October 2019
Key themes: people, partnerships

Storytelling content
Our additional, ongoing storytelling content is shared on the web, and via our social media, email bulletins and Intranet, where appropriate.

A day in the life of a councillor (Videos), 2018
http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-councillor/

Bringing councillors and officers together (Video with Cllr Taylor & Adele Poppleton), July 2018
https://youtu.be/tMWwq8

Being a councillor (Videos with newly elected councillors), July 2018
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9_3xjsgMAMfQJmWZD34XEy78mGu6oom6

How we're putting councillors at the heart of what we do (Democracy blog), October 2018
http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/putting-councillors-at-the-heart-of-what-we-do/

How we're changing local democracy (Video with Cllr Scott), December 2018
https://youtu.be/JkbvRnACnWs

Being part of the Cabinet (Videos with Cllr Walker & Cllr Pattison), October 2019
planned

Help content
Working in a Political Environment training (Democracy blog), July 2019
http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/working-in-a-political-environment-july-2019/

Working in a Political Environment (Intranet News), October 2019
planned

2. Improving methods

Review channels & approaches

Initial research into corporate communications methods and channels for contacting councillors was done in Autumn 2018. This showed that staff were unclear about the methods we currently use for keeping councillors informed. There was also low awareness about what methods our services are using to contact councillors directly (or how often this might be happening). We discovered that few councillors are signed up to our suite of email bulletins, which are a useful source of corporate news.

Ward-level bitesize info pilot

Test encouraging Cllr insight

Promote existing tools

Be ward-wise - update your People Finder entry (Intranet news), October 2019
planned

MyKIrklees Account - connect with your councillors (social media - for citizens), October 2019
planned

3. Encouraging openness

Coverage of collaborative work

We share collaborative activities involving councillors and officers whilst they are happening, often in real time. This is in addition to our "Opening up our meetings" work, which features live coverage of Council, our Cross Party Working Group and Kirklees Question Time events, and supporting content.

Councillors visit Hillside Primary School (Live tweet), 23rd January 2019
https://twitter.com/kirkdemocracy/status/1088073265803870208

Youth Councillors meet Kirklees Councillors (Live tweet), 21st February 2019
https://twitter.com/kirkdemocracy/status/1098614708867944448

Junior and Infant School visit (Live tweet), 12th June 2019
https://twitter.com/kirkdemocracy/status/1138736381423902720

How can we best work together in Ashbrow? (Live tweet), 18th June 2019
https://twitter.com/kirkdemocracy/status/1141030390586576896

How can we best work together in Fieldhead? (Live tweet), 19th June 2019

https://twitter.com/kirkdemocracy/status/1141391934923165696

Ask Shepley in Kirkburton ward (Video), 26th June 2019
https://youtu.be/IybyPoUBHFs

Be part of the Big Local Conversation in Ashbrow (How Good is Our Place? blog), 2nd July 2019
https://howgoodisourplace.org.uk/2019/07/02/be-part-of-the-big-local-conversation/

Ask Meltham - get involved (How Good is Our Place? blog), 2nd July 2019
https://howgoodisourplace.org.uk/2019/07/02/ask-meltham-get-involved/

Listening to Birstall - get involved (How Good is Our Place? blog), 7th September 2019
https://howgoodisourplace.org.uk/2019/09/07/listening-to-birstall-get-involved/

Scrutiny
Officers told us that they find Scrutiny particularly challenging, so we will continue to create content that helps to improve people's understanding of Scrutiny and helps build confidence.

What is Scrutiny? (Video with Cllr Stewart-Turner), November 2018
https://youtu.be/8EnLKJ7QPBA

Democracy Commission update at Corporate Scrutiny (Live tweet), 29th November 2019
https://twitter.com/kirkdemocracy/status/1068090175354486784

Economy and Neighbourhood Scrutiny Panel (Video with Cllr Walker), December 2018
https://youtu.be/R5vnlapTj_A

Scrutiny and our town centres (Video with Cllr Walker), December 2018
https://youtu.be/YX6o-cCiOCU

New introduction to Scrutiny (Video with Cllr Smaje), October 2019
planned

What each Scrutiny panel does (Videos with new panel chairs), October to November 2019
planned

4. Sharing our work

Local Democracy Week
Local Democracy Week 2018 (Democracy in Kirklees website)
http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/local-democracy-week-2018/

Local Democracy Week 2019 (Democracy in Kirklees website)
http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/local-democracy-week-2019/

New councillor induction

New councillor induction (Live tweet), 8th May 2019

https://twitter.com/kirkdemocracy/status/1126046056175869952

Democracy work programme

Working Group (Democracy in Kirklees website)

http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/working-group/

National promotion