

REPORT TO: Audit & Governance Committee

MEETING DATE: 15 March 2011

BY: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Interim Report on the Review of the Impact of Multi-Member Wards and Officer/Member Relations

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Audit & Governance Committee with an interim report on the review of the impact of multi-member wards and officer/member relations.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Audit & Governance Committee is asked to:
- note the interim findings from the surveys of councillors and officers (para 3.11)
 - comment on the draft recommendations arising from these interim findings (para 3.12)
 - note the proposal to hold a members' workshop on the Councillors Code of Conduct.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Review of the Impact of Multi-Member Wards and Officer/Member Relations is being carried out in response to three issues.
- 3.2 Firstly, the action plan from the Audit Scotland Annual Report to Members 2008/09 included the following action point: *'the Council should review the effectiveness of new ways of working in order to ensure all members are fully aware of their respective responsibilities.'*

- 3.3 The report had noted that *'the creation of multi-member wards has required new ways of working to support efficient representation and sharing of workload'*. It suggested that: *'it is important that the effectiveness of these new ways of working are assessed and reviewed with the results reported to Council. Such a review will assist members in evaluating whether the arrangements are working satisfactorily or whether modifications are required.'*
- 3.4 The Audit Scotland report suggested that not carrying out the review carries the risk that: *'arrangements for multi-member wards are not ensuring that all members are aware of and meeting the expectations placed on them and are sharing information and citizen specific workloads effectively.'*
- 3.5 Secondly, an Audit Scotland study into the roles and working relationships of officers and elected members (August 2010) touched on the issue of multi-member wards. The study looked at how well councillors and officers understand their respective roles and responsibilities. The report includes key points for action for councillors and officers to support good working relationships, improve awareness and understanding about roles and responsibilities and ensure governance arrangements are fit for purpose and up-to-date.
- 3.6 Thirdly, the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning (Best Value 2) that will be carried out by Audit Scotland will consider the working relationships between elected members and between officer and elected members. Any issues or problems in these relationships that might impact on the Council's capacity to sustain continuous improvement will be picked up and commented on in the Audit.

Scope of the Review

- 3.7 The review will consider three key issues:
- The effectiveness of new ways of working (multi-member wards) in order to ensure all members are aware of their respective responsibilities
 - How well councillors and officers understand their respective roles, responsibilities and relationships
 - Areas of improvement to achieve better practice and performance.
- 3.8 Specific options that will be considered by the review include:
- the future personal development and training needs of councillors.
 - whether the guidance on roles and responsibilities in relation to scrutiny and review should be extended.
 - whether East Lothian Council should adopt a multi-member ward protocol.
 - whether councillors would benefit from a caseload management system and whether/ how this could be linked to the Council's CRM system.

- the role of councillors in the Local Area Forums.

Methodology

3.9 The review is being carried out using the following methodology:

- Gather councillors' views through a survey (Jan/ Feb 2011)
- Gather the views of senior officers (CMT and Business Unit Managers) (Jan/ Feb 2011)
- Presentation of interim findings from the research to date (Audit & Governance Committee, 15 March 2011)
- Gather the views of staff who have regular contact with councillors on constituency matters, including members' support staff/PAs (Mar/Apr 2011)
- Gather the views of office-bearers of the Association of Community Councils and ELTRP on the roles and responsibilities of councillors and the impact of multi-member wards (Mar/Apr 2011)
- Identify good practice on officer-member protocols and caseload management (Jan - Apr 2011)
- Final report presented to full Council (17 May 2011).

Interim Findings

3.10 These interim findings are based on the results of the surveys of elected members and officers. Nineteen councillors and 37 officers completed the on-line survey in January 2011. This represents 83% of councillors, with a high level of representation across the political parties (ranging from 71% of Labour councillors to 100% of Conservative councillors). The 37 officers represent almost 60% of the 65 members of the CMT and Business Unit Managers who we asked to complete the survey.

3.11 The following bullet points are a summary of the key interim findings from the surveys.

Impact of multi-member wards

- The creation of multi-member wards has had an impact on the work of elected members and council officers
- Elected members are more likely than officers to have experienced problems with the way in which multi-member wards operate
- The majority of councillors have some form of agreement with other members in their ward to share workload (e.g. attendance at community meetings) and almost all councillors share information and engage with other members in their ward. Good practice should be shared amongst all councillors.

- Some services have protocols in place to assist in dealing with elected members and ward business. Good practice should be shared across the Council.
- Only a small minority of councillors and officers think that there is nothing more that the Council and councillors themselves can do to make the multi-member ward system operate more effectively, including providing councillors with access to a caseload management system and adopting a voluntary protocol providing guidance on the working relationship between ward councillors
- Some concern was expressed at the level of trust and respect between councillors
- The majority of councillors reported that they positive and constructive relationships with Community Councils
- Further thought needs to be given to the role that councillors might play in Local Area Forums

Relationships between councillors and officers

- Whereas councillors are confident that they understand the difference between the roles of and responsibilities of councillors and those of officers a majority of officers who responded to the survey are less confident
- Officers are less likely than councillors to think that there is a positive relationship and a climate of trust and respect between councillors and officers

Guidance, information and training

- There were differing views about how well the Councillors Code of Conduct is understood and applied in the Council
- Councillors are less confident that they are able to perform well their scrutiny role than their other roles
- Although the majority of councillors are clear about their roles and responsibilities as representatives on outside bodies around half of these councillors think their effectiveness as the Council representative on these bodies could be improved
- A majority of respondents to the surveys agreed that consideration should be given to producing a guide to the roles and responsibilities of councillors
- A majority of respondents agreed that further consideration needs to be given to the training and development needs of councillors
- The majority of councillors agreed they would definitely or might use an electronic caseload management system.

3.12 The review is not yet complete but the findings from the surveys of councillors and elected members suggest that the recommendations that will be made in the final report might cover the following issues:

- sharing good practice in relation to protocols and agreements in relation ward councillors sharing information and workload, including consideration of a voluntary protocol
- sharing good practice developed by services to assist in dealing with elected members and ward business
- guidance on the role councillors might play in Local Area Forums
- guidance on the roles and responsibilities of councillors
- promotion of and support for councillors participation in the Improvement Service's CPD for elected members
- consideration of councillors use of the electronic Caseload Management System that has been developed by the Improvement Service.

3.13 The Standards Commission for Scotland has been running a series of roadshows for councillors and officers to promote awareness and understanding of the new Code of Conduct for Councillors. The Commission is planning to publish new guidance on the Code once the roadshows have been completed in April or May 2011. Due to a clash with the Council's Planning Committee only three East Lothian councillors were able to attend the roadshow that was held in Edinburgh on 1st March. In order to promote greater awareness and understanding of the Code of Conduct it is proposed that a workshop on the new Code should be organised by the Council. The workshop which will be held as soon as possible after the publication of the guidance on the Code of Conduct will also provide an opportunity for the findings and recommendations from the review to be discussed by councillors and officers in a workshop setting.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The review of the impact of multi-member wards and officer member relations

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – none.

6.2 Personnel – none.

6.3 Other – none.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Analysis of responses to councillors and officers surveys

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DATE	3 rd March 2011