

24 March 2016

ITEM: 5

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Member Support Services

Wards and communities affected:

All

Key Decision:

Non-key

Report of: Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Accountable Head of Service: Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal Services

Accountable Director: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive

This report is public

Executive Summary

This report outlines the current resources and support services available to Members and sets out the parameters of the current review into Member services and how this will affect Members in the future.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 The Committee consider and comment on the report and agree whether there are any actions that can be taken to inform Members of what resources are available to them.

1.2 Feed in any comments to inform the current review of resources.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The question of Member support services has come into sharp focus over the 2015-16 municipal year due to increasing pressure on central budgets but also as part of the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations in the summer of 2015, which led to a Full Council debate about what support was available to Members in their day to day roles. This report aims to clarify the details of this support.

Member Services

2.2 Member Services currently consists of two full time posts and one apprentice. The team works across all political parties to provide support in the following areas:

- Deal with Member casework (primarily progressing issues on behalf of Members through 'Member Enquiries', which is a service provided by the central Information Team)
- Orientate new Members and organise Member IT equipment
- Revise the Member Handbook each year
- Organise the following events
 - Fly the Flag
 - Armed Forces Day
 - St. George's Day
 - Civic Dinner
 - Some aspects of Annual Council
 - Commonwealth Day
 - Remembrance Sunday
 - Cycle Marathon
 - Some Elections duties
 - Any Mayoral charity events
- Manage the Mayor's diary and administration, including liaising with the chauffeur
- PA support to Group Leaders and Councillors, including diary management, booking travel and accommodation and other general requests.
- Member Training Programme Administration
- Outside Bodies administration
- Administrate Member expense claims.
- Refreshing DBS checks

2.3 For the sake of work management, each officer is assigned particular tasks to allow them to build up expertise and knowledge to provide effective support in specific areas of work. For example, one officer is expected to act as the key support for any Mayoral enquiries.

2.4 All staff work apolitically and are expected to support any Member from any political party. With this in mind a number of activities are not suitable for Member Services to undertake:

- Any party political activities such as designing campaign leaflets or administrating internal political party business.
- Undertaking any personal or private duties for Members, such as booking private appointments or running personal errands.

2.5 Member Services is a finite resource and there is an expectation that the team will prioritise work according to their workloads. Work for party leaders and the Mayor are considered a high priority. That said there has never been an issue raised by backbench Members that adequate support has not been provided for them.

2.6 The total budget for the Service is currently £154,093 which includes all staff costs, pension and National Insurance contributions plus the budget for the Mayor's chauffeur service.

Stationery

- 2.7 Stationery and general office services are available to all Members who are expected to use them appropriately and within reason. Members have access to pens, paper and office equipment for Member use and may request these items through the Member Services Team. Stationery has to comply with the Council's procurement rules. This stops officers/Members purchasing expensive pens or luxury paper when cheaper alternatives are available.
- 2.8 The Member Services Team is also able to send and administrate written correspondence and mail on behalf of Members. Members may also access envelopes and paper for correspondence via the Member Services Team if they wish to undertake this work on their own accord. Due to a small budget, the Council is unable to provide Members with significant amounts of envelopes or postage and activities such as mail drops for one hundred houses, for example, would have to be funded through party funds or via a relevant department who may be working in collaboration with a Member on a certain issue. In the latter case, the department would be expected to manage the co-ordination of the correspondence and not the individual Member. The only mass correspondence supported by internal budgets relate to mayoral or other civic duties.

ICT

- 2.8 All Members can purchase tablet devices through the Council and related ICT support is provided by Member Services or the ICT Helpdesk. Mobile phones are supplied to all Members by the Council. Static desktop computers and telephones are available freely to all Members in the Members Area on the ground floor alongside printing services.
- 2.9 Following the digitisation programme introduced by the former Chief Executive, all Members were asked to return their laptops and printers to the Council and with the use of tablets there is an expectation that the need to print documents will reduce significantly in the near future. The amount of Members requesting printer ink cartridges has significantly reduced in the last year and as the Council has not yet officially gone fully digital, these purchases are still supported. The cost of an ink cartridge ranges between £30 and £50 each through the Council's suppliers.

Member Training

- 2.10 Member training is provided to Members every year. A separate report that came to this committee in November 2015 detailed the resources available to Members. In essence the training is administrated by Member Services and delivered by the relevant departments.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 In September 2015 the Principal Democratic Services Officer was asked to review the Member Services Team. To allow for this review the Legal Services Business Manager took over management of the team.

3.2 The review took into account the views of group leaders and senior officers and provided a number of options for delivering the service for the future. These options have been submitted to the Head of Legal Services and are being discussed with the Chief Executive. This process has yet to be completed and therefore, this committee has an opportunity to put forward any views that will be forwarded to the relevant managers to consider in tangent with the review report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Member resources must be responsive to the needs of Members as well as taking into account other factors such as budgets and professional conduct. This report allows Members to add any further comments on the future look and work of Member Services support, as well as addressing any other issues to do with informing Members of what resources they have access to.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 The review of Member Services took into account the views of all party leaders as well as those of senior officers at the Council.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 Member Support is crucial in enabling Members to perform their roles properly and its efficient functioning ensures that all corporate priorities are upheld and pursued through the elected body at the Council. Current budget pressures bring into sharp focus the need for support to elected members to cover the essential requirements of Member support and to avoid duties or jobs that do not contribute to the effective discharge of ward and other Member duties.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Business Manager, Finance

Member resources are part of the wider Legal Services budget and as such are subject to regular review and monitoring. The purchase of resources from training to stationery must be undertaken judiciously so as to keep within spending limits.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

Member support services are responsive to the needs of all Members regardless of political background and other factors. Services are applied equally across all Members and where special arrangements are required, officers work to accommodate these.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

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