

**Norwich City Council**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **Item No 7**

REPORT for meeting to be held on 7 March 2013

### **The role of the ward councillor**

**Summary:**

This report is an opportunity for the scrutiny committee to review the role of the ward councillor in line with the council's new operating model and the opportunities provided by the council's neighbourhood model.

**Conclusions:**

By taking part in this process the scrutiny committee can inform the work to review the role of a ward councillor.

**Recommendation:**

To make recommendations on the role of the ward councillor including the role profile and support.

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## **Review of the role of a ward councillor**

**Scrutiny committee:  
21 February**

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## **To cover**

- Background
- Potential implications of blueprint for the future councillor role
- Review process
- Feedback from LGA workshop
- Neighbourhood model - priority setting
- Potential areas of focus / recommendations

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## Background - the council blueprint

- The blueprint (operating model) was developed as guide for how the Council designs services and structures to deliver the vision and priorities within its Corporate Plan in a way that proactively addresses the financial pressures and changing policy and legislative environment it faces.
- Developed through a process of analysis, engagement and review including a peer challenge that recommended further work to look at the role of a ward councillor given the new model.
- The blueprint acts as a 'working aide' for those who will be re-designing services and structures for the Council.
- It, therefore, drives and guides the council's ongoing transformation programme
- The blueprint sets out key principles across four key areas of the council's operating model:
  - Customers
  - Organisational design
  - People
  - Locations
- The fifth area of the council's operating model is ICT and a new ICT strategy is being developed with LGSS to support the blueprint.

## Customer

### Design principles

- We will be very clear about what we can and cannot provide through clear customer information to manage expectations and demand.
- Customers will be encouraged to self serve through the web wherever this is appropriate. We will then focus resources on supporting those who need more help or have special requirements.

### Examples/ implications

- Wherever practical services will be designed through engagement with citizens utilising approaches such as co-creation.

# Organisational design

## Design principles

- The council will continuously review the activities it carries out in line with its vision and priorities. Low priority activity across the council will be challenged and stopped.
- Citizen and customer information will be used as the basis for service design to ensure we best meets priority outcomes for citizens within the reducing resources we have.
- A range of service approaches will be considered including – direct delivery, shared services, partnerships, joint ventures, and commissioning.
- Final service arrangements will be selected on merit and take into account the need to maintain capacity and influence over strategy and outcomes for the city in line with the aim to be 'a collaborative council' and keep services 'within the Norwich family'.

## Examples/ implications

- Asset management will be strengthened and other approaches developed to increase council income.

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# People

## Design principles

- The council will embed a shared culture and ethos across all its people, acting and behaving as a single organisation based on the council's core PACE values of:
  - **Pride** – we will believe in what we do and demonstrate integrity in how we do things
  - **Accountability** – we will take responsibility, do what we say we will and see things through
  - **Collaboration** – we will work with others and help others to succeed
  - **Excellence** – we will strive to do things well and look for ways to innovate and improve.

## Examples/ implications

- Work will be carried out with members to define the role of a ward councillor in line with this new operating model and the changing context.
- The member development plan will be reviewed and refined to ensure that member's are supported to excel in their roles as community leaders and to enable the council to deliver its priorities.

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# Locations

## Design principles

- City Hall will be the council's primary office accommodation. The building will be reshaped as much as possible within resource and legal constraints to maximise space utilisation and opportunities for income generation and sharing.
- New ways of working will be put in place to enable the move to a significantly reduced accommodation base, supported by appropriate technology, including mobile working and home working to ensure effective service delivery is maintained.

## Examples/ implications

- The council will actively work to turn City Hall into a public service centre by sharing the building with key council partners.

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# Review process

## Role

- LGA facilitated workshop
- New role profile (see handout 1 for existing profile)
- Neighbourhood model – priority setting
- Use of cross party working groups for policy / options development
- Member liaison boards
- Working in a political organisation sessions

## Support

- New member learning and development programme (informed by personal development plans and LGA workshop) approved by councillor development group (see handout 2 for report)
- Member ICT review

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## Feedback – LGA facilitated workshop

### Key themes

- **Resources** – concerns over time constraints to undertake future role.
- **Information** - importance of access to appropriate information in accessible formats including from partners e.g. ward maps showing all service provision in the area. Also importance of customers being able to access information/ self serve more which would free councillors up to focus on strategic issues, priority setting and problem solving. ICT needs to support this.

## Feedback – LGA facilitated workshop

- **Citizen engagement and communication** – what is the best way to engage and test council performance on the ground. Challenges around engaging with hard to reach groups. As 'channel shift' occurs, this may require councillors to focus on supporting those sections of the community that don't access information or services through the web and also use more channels and mechanisms to engage and communicate with service users and the electorate themselves– such as social media (Twitter, Facebook) as well as through more traditional means (letters, surgery).
- **Relationships with council partners / service providers** – there will need to be clarity on the role of ward councillors with partners and how they engage and influence priorities and performance.

## Feedback – LGA facilitated workshop

- **Skills, knowledge and learning** – a range of new skills and learning will be required including:
  - greater understanding of the wider landscape and council partners
  - how to link city wide strategic issues with ward issues
  - governance arrangements, roles and how to influence decisions
  - member / officer relationship
  - contract and performance mgt
  - social media skills e.g. twitter, face book etc
  - training and demonstration of the website
  - time mgt and speed reading
  - soft skills ( facilitation, negotiation, influencing, conflict mgt etc)
  - access to mentoring
  - time for reflection and learning from elsewhere

## Feedback – facilitated workshop

### Specific elements to support future role:

- More information for prospective candidates on the council and how it operates
- New councillor role profile to reflect evolving role
- Key information to support role (e.g. ward maps) and to allow citizen self service
- Mechanisms for engagement with citizens and key council partners
- Quick and efficient responses to ward councillor emails and issues, casework support
- Access to officer advice
- Protocols and guidance for social media use
- Supporting ICT

## **Neighbourhood model – member role**

The key elements of the council's neighbourhood model included:

- Enhanced community engagement to enable communities to have greater influence over how services are delivered
- Targeting deprivation by addressing and prioritising local needs
- Better coordination of services (internally and externally) in an area
- Enhanced member engagement

## **Changes & opportunities**

- Aligned neighbourhood boundaries between the council and the police
- The closure of SNAP panels (as a mechanism to agree local community safety priorities)
- Improved information sharing and joint working on vulnerable locations
- Using an evidence based approach and problem solving approach
- The development of informal tenant patch panels
- The need to pool residents views from the neighbourhood team, neighbourhood housing, customer contact, the police and ward councillors
- Finding a simple mechanism to jointly agree local priorities based on this information



## **Priority setting arrangements**

A quarterly informal priority setting meeting in each neighbourhood - this meeting will:

- Review data and information from the council and police and eventually other partners
- Pool information from engagement activities e.g. walkabouts, street surgeries, events, ward councillors
- Problem solve and agree local priorities and develop a rolling action plan in each neighbourhood
- Involve the neighbourhood manager, police inspector, housing team leader, ward councillors (one from each ward in the neighbourhood), plus other 3rd sector or partners relevant to the area (this might include a head teacher, GP or church leader).
- The meeting will take place on a quarterly basis
- Terms of reference have been developed

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## **Potential areas of focus / recommendations**

To consider further work or recommendations in regards to:

- A new role profile
- Specific elements of the member role or support in relation to the new council blueprint

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# The Councillor Role

## Purpose

- To participate constructively in the governance of the Council.
- To contribute to the formation and scrutiny of the Council's policies, budget, strategies and service delivery.
- To represent effectively the interests of their wards and deal with enquiries and representations from their constituents in an appropriate and timely manner.
- To champion the improvement of the quality of life of the community in terms of equality, economy and environment.
- To represent the Council effectively when appointed to an outside body and regularly report back on issues relevant to the Council via e-councillor, the Members Bulletin and or the Cabinet/Council.
- To act at all times with probity and propriety in the best interests of the Council.

## Duties and Responsibilities

- To fulfil the statutory and any locally determined requirements of an elected member of a local authority and the authority itself, including compliance with all relevant codes of conduct, and participation in those decisions and activities reserved to the full Council e.g. agreeing the policy framework and setting the budget.
- To participate effectively as a member of any committee, panel or working party to which the councillor is appointed.
- To participate in the activities of an outside body to which the councillor is appointed providing two way communication between the organisations. Also to develop and maintain a working knowledge of the Council's policies and practices in relation to that body and of the community's needs and aspirations in respect of that body's role and functions.
- Except for Cabinet Members, to participate in the scrutiny or performance review of the services of the authority including, where the Council so decides, the scrutiny of policies and budget and their effectiveness in achieving the strategic objectives of the Council.
- To participate as appointed in consultative processes with the community and other organisations.
- To provide a link between the authority to the community through the various forums available.
- To develop and maintain a working knowledge of the Council's services, management arrangements, powers/duties and constraints and to develop good working relationships with relevant officers of the Council.
- To develop and maintain an understanding of other organisations and services that serve the area.
- Be responsible for continuous personal development. Take advantage of learning opportunities to build on understanding and knowledge, and to develop relevant skills.

- To contribute constructively to open government and democratic renewal through active encouragement to the community to participate generally in the democratic process.
- To conduct the business of the Council within the Council and not through the written or broadcast media

### **Skills Required**

- Good communication and Interpersonal skills
- Ability to relate and deal with the public in a professional and timely manner
- Ability to work effectively with Council officers and outside organisations
- Community and Civic Leadership skills

## **Councillor Development Group - Proposed Member Learning and Development Programme**

### **1.0 Background and purpose**

- 1.1 The overall objective of member development is to ensure that all elected members can develop and maintain the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their roles as councillors of Norwich City Council effectively.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is propose a new member learning and development programme for the next 20 months and a new approach for group specific learning and development for agreement by the councillor development group.

### **2.0 Development of the programme**

- 2.1 The new member learning and development programme can be found at Annex A and its development has been informed by:
  - Personal development plans submitted by councillors
  - The corporate plan and changing pace blueprint (operating model)
  - The review of the role of a ward councillor including the LGA facilitated all member workshop held in November which specifically discussed member skills and learning
  - The national and local context that the council operates in
  - The LGA's six core skills for councillors
- 2.2 An earlier draft of the member learning and development programme was sent to all councillors for comments in November. Only one comment was received which commended the programme.
- 2.3 Since then some refinements have been made to the programme to take account of the discussions at the LGA facilitated all member workshop referred to above. This has resulted in the programme becoming smaller and more focused.

### **3.0 Makeup of the programme**

- 3.1 The programme is split into nine key themes:
  - Induction
  - Business essentials
  - Local leadership
  - Communication skills
  - Regulating and monitoring
  - Partnership working
  - Political understanding
  - Scrutiny and challenge

- ICT skills (these courses will be run in line with demand as waiting lists fill up and will be also be attended by officers)
- 3.2 The programme is based on a mixture of learning approaches including e-learning, officer delivered training and externally provided training.
- 3.3 An example of one of the training sessions proposed as part of the programme is included at Annex B (scrutiny development including questioning skills).
- 3.4 The member learning and development programme would be complimented by the ongoing programme of monthly all member briefings on key relevant topics and emerging issues.

#### 4.0 Rollout of the programme

- 4.1 If the programme is agreed by the councillor development group it will be rolled out immediately with a first tranche of training sessions arranged for the next 10 months. It is proposed that the first tranche would include the following elements from the programme being made available to all councillors in addition to e-learning and committee specific training e.g. cabinet or scrutiny development:

- Personal safety (business essentials)
- Safeguarding children (business essentials)
- Safeguarding vulnerable adults (business essentials)
- Data protection training (business essentials)
- Introduction to the customer contact centre, council website and the use of social media (local leadership)
- Speed reading skills (communication skills)
- Performance management (regulating and monitoring)
- Negotiating and influencing skills (partnership working)
- Commissioning, contract and relationship management (partnership working)
- Code of conduct, corporate governance, how decision making works and officer/ member working (political understanding).

#### 5.0 Delivery of the programme

- 5.1 Generally, given the size of the programme it is expected that there would be on average one training session provided for all councillors each month in addition to access to e-learning and any committee specific training required.
- 5.2 To help to ensure that members can plan effectively to allow them to attend upcoming training sessions it is proposed to have a regular day each month when training sessions would normally be arranged. It is proposed that this will be the first Tuesday of each month with the

training itself taking place in the afternoon / evening depending on the length of the particular session.

- 5.3 There will be occasions where certain training such as that for specific committees will be arranged at other times to fit with particular requirements e.g. where it is beneficial for it to be held prior to or after a scheduled committee meeting. However, generally most training would be arranged on the first Tuesday of each month.
- 5.4 The delivery of the member learning and development programme will be coordinated and supported by Christine Nicholls from the council's Learning and organisational development team and Chris Lambert from Democratic services.
- 5.5 As part of this approach from April 2013 councillors will have access to the council's learning portal, which can be accessed via the web, whereby e-learning can be carried out and places on training sessions can be booked. Places on sessions will also be able to be booked by contacting the learning and organisational development team direct. Reminders will also be provided to councillors on upcoming training sessions and e-learning opportunities through e-councillor.
- 6.0 Proposed approach to group specific learning and development
- 6.1 Councillors have previously suggested that a proportion of the councillor development budget should be allocated to each of the political groups on a pro rata basis to allow them to commission specific learning and development.
- 6.2 It is proposed that this is agreed on the basis of the following overriding principles:
  - That the use of that budget by each political group relates to learning and development directly and wholly related to the role of being a councillor of Norwich City Council. For example the cost of training or a conference related to a particular piece of case work or policy development a councillor is involved in or a team building session for the political group of councillors at the council.
  - It would not be acceptable for this budget to be used for learning and development costs relating to any activities, roles or potential roles within each of the wider political parties or for personal development activities not directly and wholly related to the role of being a councillor of Norwich City Council.
- 6.3 Within these overriding principles each political group would be able to determine what specific learning and development it uses its allocated budget for. Christine Nicholls within the learning and organisational development team will be available to provide advice to political groups on types of training available etc if required.

- 6.4 Training and conferences would need to be booked via Chris Lambert within the Democratic Services team so that it can be purchased through the council's purchasing system and in compliance with its accounting processes and the overriding principles set out above.

#### 7.0 Budget requirements

- 7.1 The current budget for councillor development at Norwich City Council is approximately £9,400 per annum. It is proposed that this is allocated as follows:

- Approximately £6,100 for the member learning and development programme
- Approximately £3,300 to be allocated to the three political groups on a pro rata basis in line with political balance. This would currently mean the following amounts would be allocated to each group for group specific learning and development:
  - Labour group - £1785
  - Green group - £1275
  - Liberal Democrat group - £255

#### 8.0 Future review

- 8.1 It is proposed that the councillor development group reviews the success of the programme and approach to group specific training again in 10 months time. This would include looking at:

- the take up of the learning and development opportunities by councillors
- analysis from the evaluation sheets completed by councillors attending training sessions etc
- expenditure.

#### 9.0 Recommendations

- 9.1 It is recommended that the councillor development group agrees:

- the proposed member learning and development programme for the next 20 months and its rollout and delivery as described
- the proposed approach to group specific learning and development in line with the principles and arrangements described
- the proposed allocation of the budget
- that the success of the programme and approach is reviewed in 10 months time by the councillor development group
- that each of the members of the councillors development group communicate and promote the new arrangements to the other councillor within their group.

### **Annex A - Draft member learning and development programme**

<b>Learning pathway / core skill area</b>	<b>Course/Workshop Title</b>	<b>Delivery method</b>
Induction	Induction session 1- Introduction to being a councillor including key governance and practical elements	To be run internally
Induction	Induction session 2 - The big picture including introduction to the policy and budget framework, national policy context and management structure.	To be run internally
Induction	Induction session 3 - Contacting the council, key services, case work and member development	To be run internally
Induction	ICT training for new councillors	LGSS
Induction	Officer buddy system for new councillors	To be run internally
Business essentials	Learning styles questionnaire (online tool)	E-learning
Business essentials	Personal safety	External provision
Business essentials	Safeguarding vulnerable adults	To be determined
Business essentials	Safeguarding children	To be run internally / E-learning
Business essentials	Equality and diversity	To be run internally
Business essentials	Data protection training	To be run internally / E-learning
Business essentials	Hate crimes and incidents	E-learning
Business essentials	All members briefing programme	Ongoing – internal provision
Local leadership	Chairing and managing effective meetings	External provision
Local leadership	Introduction to local government finance	To be run internally
Local leadership	Introduction to housing and neighbourhood working	To be run internally
Local leadership	Introduction to the customer contact centre, council website and the use of social media	To be run internally
Local leadership	Planning - how the system works	To be run internally
Local leadership	Cabinet development	To be determined



Communication skills	Handling difficult situations with customers	External provision
Communication skills	Public speaking and presentation skills	External provision
Communication skills	Speed reading skills	External provision
Regulating and monitoring	Performance management	To be run internally
Regulating and monitoring	Licensing/ regulatory - how the system works for non committee members	To be run internally
Regulating and monitoring	Licensing/ regulatory - specialist training for committee members	To be run internally
Regulating and monitoring	Audit committee	To be run internally
Partnership working	Negotiating and influencing skills	External provision
Partnership working	Commissioning, contract and relationship management	To be run internally
Partnership working	Specialist training for members on key partnership/ liaison boards	To be run internally
Political understanding	Code of conduct, corporate governance, how decision making works and officer/ member working	To be run internally
Scrutiny and challenge	Scrutiny - specialist development training for committee members including questioning skills	Internal / external
ICT	Intro to PowerPoint 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Intermediate PowerPoint 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Intro to Word 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Intermediate Word 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Advanced Word 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Advanced Word 2003 - mail merge	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Advanced Word 2003 - tables, forms & field codes	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Intro to Excel 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Intermediate Excel 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up
ICT	Advanced Excel 2003	Delivered as waiting lists fill up

## **Annex B - Proposed scrutiny development training**

- 1.1 The purpose of this training event is to assist the learning and development of the city council's scrutiny committee. To build on earlier training and development initiatives with the use of a mixture of group exercises, presentations and discussions.
- 1.2 Having taken part in the training the aim is that members will be further enabled to:
  - 1.2.1 Recognise the complementary strengths of the individuals that make up the scrutiny committee and the benefits of effective team working.
  - 1.2.2 Understand prepared papers and be confident in identifying areas for further probing and investigation.
  - 1.2.3 Use a range of questioning and investigative techniques to enable then to get to the 'heart of the issue' under scrutiny.
  - 1.2.4 Shape effective conclusions and recommendations from scrutiny work.
  - 1.2.5 Think strategically and creatively in assessing the links between areas of review, partners and stakeholders.
- 1.3 The programme will be:
  - 1.31 **Welcome and introduction.**
  - 1.32 **Team roles and complementary strengths;** feedback from some earlier analysis of the scrutiny committee's team strengths using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) tool. This will include facilitated discussion around the benefits of adopting a 'team based' approach to scrutiny.
  - 1.33 **Analysing and interpreting information;** a focus on some of the prepared reports and key information that scrutiny members routinely consider and some tips on how best to analyse and interpret this. This will include a case study exercise to demonstrate the main learning points, e.g. the need to consider the 'bigger picture' issues in the first instance.
  - 1.34 **Questioning and further investigation – skills and approaches;** an outline of the importance and most effective ways of tackling questioning and investigative exercises during scrutiny work. This will include questioning techniques, listening skills and practical frameworks for 'drilling down' into the real issues of concern, e.g. critical analysis etc.
  - 1.35 **Shaping conclusions and recommendations;** a focus on the importance of interpreting key results and reaching consensus on the action required from any scrutiny investigation. This will include the importance of developing SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timetabled) recommendations. The training will also include an outline of some strategic and creative thinking techniques which can help

to generate new ideas to present to decision makers, and some discussion around the nature of challenge and influence.

1.36 **Summing up and final thoughts.**

**2. THE TRAINER**

- 2.1 The session will be provided and facilitated by a local freelance training consultant who specialises in local government training for both members and officers.
- 2.2 Listed below are recent examples of work carried out by the trainer and there has been good feed back from other local councils in Norfolk as well as further afield.

Developing Effective Member/Officer Relations  
Facilitation Skills  
Presentation Skills  
Cabinet/Scrutiny Interface  
Engaging with Communities  
Managing Change  
Driving Continuous Improvement  
Ethics and Probity  
Leadership for Members  
Performance Assessment and Review  
Chairmanship for Aspiring Members  
Business and Strategic Planning  
Commissioning Third Sector Organisations  
An Introduction to Scrutiny  
Interviewing, Listening and Questioning Skills  
Effective Scrutiny of Finance  
Effective Scrutiny of External Bodies  
Leading & Coordinating the Business of Scrutiny  
Analysing and Interpreting Scrutiny Information  
Influencing and Challenging  
Promoting Community Cohesion  
Representation on Outside Bodies  
Managing Effective Surgeries and Casework