

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
4 JULY 2007

**REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR INVOLVEMENT OF
MEMBERS IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

Purpose of Report

The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the attached Action Plan to progress the review of arrangements for the involvement of Members in the decision making process.

Background

The Committee was asked to review the current arrangements particularly following the disbandment of the Advisory Panels. The Standards Committee was keen to give all Members the opportunity to actively participate in shaping the review. To this end, the Committee arranged a workshop session which was held on 27 March 2007. A short questionnaire was sent to all Members prior to the workshop which sought their views on the current system and what they wished to achieve from any new system.

The workshop examined what did and did not work with the current system and what Members wanted to achieve from the decision making process. The workshop then considered options available to address the aspirations of Members.

A report on the findings from the workshop was presented to the Standards Committee on 18 April which made a number of recommendations to Council. Council adopted the following recommendations of the Standards Committee at its meeting on 8 May 2007:

1. *That the recommendations set out in the report detailed at paragraphs (a) and (b) below, be endorsed, it being noted that the implementation of these measures will require further work by both members and officers alike.*
 - (a) *That the Standards Committee recommends to Council that it agrees the suggestions outlined in Appendix 1 (as amended by the inclusion of the following in the last section on 'Briefing of Members') of the report presented, to help increase the engagement of members in the decision making process:*

“To consider specifically what information and support members need to have to enable them to engage and inform their parish and town councils and residents”.

(Note: A copy of Appendix 1 as amended is attached)

- (b) *That the Standards Committee receive an action plan at its next meeting on the progress towards implementing these revised proposals.*

The Standards Committee had also made the following recommendations, although Council did not respond specifically to them:

- 2. *That Council notes the following comments of the Standards Committee:*
 - (i) *that arrangements be made to enable officers to better understand the needs of members and what is required to facilitate the discharge of their responsibilities;*
 - (ii) *there was a consistent theme of concern expressed at the workshop regarding members’ attendance and the Council be invited to comment on those concerns.*

The Committee may wish to decide to monitor the situation and/or pursue these recommendations further with Council. However, the suggested monitoring of Members’ emails and surveying Members as referred to in the Action Plan, would assist with (i). The Committee may wish to revisit (ii) at a later date.

Next Steps

Accordingly, an Action Plan (Appendix 2) has been prepared for the Committee to consider and maintain the momentum in progressing implementation of revised proposals to enhance the involvement of all Members in the decision making process.

Members will see from the Action Plan that some work has already started to respond to the outcomes of the workshop. However some outcomes need to be considered in the context of the impending work on One Council for Wiltshire and therefore should await the announcement by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which is expected in late July 2007. Whilst a number of areas identified in the Action Plan are based on the aspirations of Members as expressed during the workshop, some are further ideas on how member involvement in the decision making process could be further improved. However, they are still subject to consultation with Members, particularly Cabinet members on how best they can be achieved to bring about the desired outcomes.

Recommendation

The views of the Committee are sought on the Action Plan.

STEPHEN GERRARD
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SERVICES

Report Author: John Quinton, Head of Democratic and Member Services