

West Wiltshire District Council

Cabinet

3 November 2004

Procedure for Informing Local Members of Ward Issues

1 Purpose

At the meeting of the Internal Overview Committee on 16 June officers were asked to develop a procedure to ensure that local Members were kept informed about issues that could have an impact on their Wards.

2 Background

Some concerns have been expressed that, on occasion, a question or issue may arise relating to an individual Ward or part of the district about which the appropriate Ward Member(s) has had no prior knowledge.

Members already receive notification of certain ward issues such as planning applications; decisions taken under delegated powers and licensing applications. However at present members receive no consistent briefing on some issues including developments taking place under permitted development rights, or applications to the County Council.

A procedure for keeping Members informed of issues relating to their Wards would clearly outline the type of information and briefing they could expect to receive and who would be responsible for this within the Council.

Internal Overview also asked that the procedure should cover the need for information to be passed to the County Council so that County members could be informed of any issues arising in their wards.

With the approval of Cabinet, the County Council would be asked to amend its procedures to incorporate a reciprocal arrangement whereby District Council members would be informed of issues relating to their Ward arising at County level.

An amended draft procedure has been developed, based on a similar document used by the County Council, and is attached as an appendix to this report.

3 Key issues

There are no financial, legal or human rights issues arising from this report.

4 Recommendations

That Cabinet formally adopts this procedure and guidelines be prepared to assist officers.

Cllr Roy While
Portfolio Holder, Finance and Performance

Bryan Walker
Corporate Communications
Manager

Procedure on Briefing and Informing Ward Members

1. It is important that local Members have the information that they need to carry out their role, particularly information that relates to their individual Ward. Such information can range from a background briefing about their local area, to notification and advice about politically sensitive matters that affect any part of their Ward.

Well briefed Members are far better equipped to be proactive in handling local issues and to respond to individuals or interest groups that may lobby them.

2. Timely briefing on urgent issues that are politically sensitive is vital. Service Managers will be expected to telephone local Members to give them advance notice of any relevant issue and to provide written information where necessary. Where written information is provided on less urgent matters, the offer of a follow up telephone discussion or a meeting could assist Members' understanding of specific issues.
3. Service Managers should also ensure that, where appropriate, County Council officers are informed and asked to pass information to the relevant County Councillors.
4. Where the press/media are involved, the Corporate Communications Team will contact Ward Members where there is thought to be a significant local issue of which they should be aware. Press enquiries relating to Ward matters which would not normally be dealt with by a Cabinet Portfolio Holder, will be passed to the appropriate Ward Member(s). Ward Members can ask Corporate Communications for advice on dealing with such enquiries. Service Managers will work with Corporate Communications to ensure a co-ordinated response where there is press/media interest.

- A. These are some examples of the type of issues that may arise where the **relevant** Ward Members can be expected to alerted by senior managers:

- Representations by local interest groups or individuals on issues where local members have not apparently been approached or informed. **Examples** are representations concerning planning applications or licence applications and any Questions or Notices of Motion.
- Works to public open spaces that have not previously been programmed and notified. **Examples** include works resulting in road closures or restricted access to facilities.
- Other local matters where decisions have to be made at short notice, such as where there may be a risk to local residents. **Examples** include urgent inspection of building works that may lead to demolition of a property or extension.

- Issues notified to the Council at short notice by partners, where the partner organisation may have the lead responsibility, i.e. locality policing or health matters. **Examples** include reduction or closure of localised policing or health services or issues affecting public safety or health that may have an impact on a particular neighbourhood.
- Complaints outcomes (non-confidential) that are specific to facilities in a local area.

B These are some pointers to the type of topic where the **relevant** Ward Members should expect a background briefing in advance:

- Ward profiling information and data becoming publicly available.
- Programmed major works or variations to local access to service provision. **Examples** include changes to opening hours of local services, location, transport arrangements, eligibility criteria or means of contact with the Council.
- Forthcoming reports (when timing is appropriate) and decisions that have specific local area impact, by Cabinet, Planning or Licensing Committee.
- Forthcoming local consultations to be carried out by the Council.
- Changes to senior staff responsibilities or postholders.
- Sale of land and/or property owned by the Council.
- Planned demolition of property, extension or renovation.
- Localised issues that may be identified to be subject to scrutiny or review.
- Enforcement action. An **example** would be action to be taken by Environmental Health.
- Forthcoming planning applications specific to a local area.
- Planned initiatives or variations to local access to service provision notified by partners.
- Awards gained by services or facilities that are specific to a local area.
- Updates on ongoing representations from interest groups and individual local residents.