

Notice of Meeting and Agenda Cross Party Sounding Board

Date	Time	Venue
Wednesday, 06 June 2018	15:30	Corporate Meeting Room 1, Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

KENNETH GRAHAM
Head of Corporate Governance

Membership

Councillor Tom Begg: Councillor Paul Mack: Councillor Eileen McCartin: Councillor Kevin Montgomery:

Councillor Iain Nicolson (Convener): Councillor Jim Paterson (Depute Convener):

Further Information

This is a meeting which is open to members of the public.

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For further information, please either email democratic-services@renfrewshire.gov.uk or telephone 0141 618 7112.

Members of the Press and Public

Members of the press and public wishing to attend the meeting should report to the customer service centre where they will be met and directed to the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies from members.

Declarations of Interest

Members are asked to declare an interest in any item(s) on the agenda and to provide a brief explanation of the nature of the interest.

Items of business

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| 1 | Elected Member Enquiries - Review | 5 - 12 |
| | Report by Chief Executive | |
| 2 | Review of the Scheme for the Establishment of
Community Councils | 13 - 18 |
| | Report by Director of Finance and Resources | |

To: Cross Party Sounding Board

On: 6 June 2018

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Elected Member Enquiries - Review

1. Summary

1.1 In early 2018, the Head of Policy of Commissioning led an initial review of the process for handling elected member enquiries and related performance.

1.2 Current processes and target timescales have been in place for a number of years, whilst the focus and nature of the contacts made by members of the public has continued to evolve.

1.3 Flowing from the review, there are several key proposals which are set out within this paper for discussion with elected members. The aim of these proposals is to strengthen the existing process, ensuring that it more effective and efficient for both elected members and services.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that members of the board:

- Note the initial findings from the review undertaken by the Head of Policy and Commissioning; and
- Consider the proposals that could be implemented to further strengthen and improve the existing process for both elected members and services.

3. Background

3.1 Renfrewshire Council is a customer focused organisation which aims to put customers at the heart of everything it does. It is estimated that services receive somewhere in the region of 3 million contacts annually, whether that is face to face, over the telephone or digitally through the web.

3.2 The key reasons for contacting the Council are varied, ranging from a service request such as a housing repair, to making an appointment to register a birth, death or marriage, or contacting the Council to make a complaint about a service received. In the past year:

- 353,000 calls were made to the contact centre;
- 42500 requests were handled by the customer service centre;
- Over 6300 complaints were responded to by Council services;
- Over 1400 Freedom of Information requests were handled by Council services; and
- In the region of 5900 elected member enquiries were received and responded to.

3.3 From the high-level statistics outlined in the bullets above, it is clear that services work every day to manage a significant number of contacts, enquiries and service or information requests. In addition, critically, the way in which customers are contacting the Council is changing. So-called “digital disruption” is driving the Council to develop the capabilities of staff and services to handle contacts online or through transactional mechanisms such as My Account. The expectations of customers are changing also, with the Council, its service standards and responsiveness being directly compared to that of multinational firms.

3.4 This challenging picture of increasing customer expectation and demand, is also illustrated in the contacts that elected members receive from constituents in their local ward. Interaction with local constituents through social media is playing an increasingly important role, and the number of enquiries that elected members are requested to take forward on behalf of constituents has increased significantly.

3.5 In recognition of the increasing demands on elected members and on services to effectively respond to enquiries, an initial review of the process for handling elected member enquiries has been led by the Head of Policy and Commissioning. Section 4 of this report provides an analysis of current corporate and service level performance in terms of responding to elected members. Section 5 sets out proposals to

strengthen the existing process and associated timescales, for discussions with members of the Cross Party Sounding Board.

4. Performance Overview

- 4.1 An initial review of the current corporate process for handling elected member enquiries was recently conducted by the Head of Policy and Commissioning. Work was undertaken to gather information from each service including Renfrewshire Leisure and Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership, on the number and nature of elected member enquiries received. Services were also asked to confirm the percentage of elected member enquiries which were responded to within target timescales.
- 4.2 The current target for services to respond to elected member enquiries is 5 working days, which has been in place for a number of years. Performance against the 5 day target has not historically been reported to a relevant policy board, although informal monitoring within services has historically taken place.
- 4.3 The review identified that no single system is used by services to monitor performance in terms of recording and monitoring elected member enquiries. In some services, the system used to record and monitor enquiries changed during 2017, and it has therefore not been possible to collate and compare data for each service between 2016/17 and 2017/18. A breakdown of the number of elected member enquiries and where possible the response rate, is provided in Table 1 below for the years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Table 1

Service	Number of Enquiries Received	
	2016/17	2017/18 (completed within timescales)
Environment & Communities	3955	5034 (64%)
Development and Housing	n/a	541 (79%)
Children's Services	n/a	102 (83%)
Finance and Resources	94	57 (83%)
Chief Executive's	30	31(69%)
Renfrewshire Leisure	n/a	41 (83%)
Health & Social Care Partnership	72	65 (66%)
TOTAL	n/a	5871

- 4.4 In total, 5871 enquiries were received by services during 2017/18. 66% of enquiries were responded to within the 5 working day target. The number of enquiries handled by the Environment and Communities Service increased by 27% between 2016/17 and 2017/18 from 3955 in 2016/17 to 5034).
- 4.5 Performance in terms of the percentage of enquiries responded to within the 5 working day timescale, varied across services in 2017/18(Ranging from between 64% to 83%).
- 4.6 Further work was undertaken with services to explore the reasons for the current level of performance being achieved corporately. Some of the key issues identified through this review process can be identified as follows:
- Many of the enquiries received are complex in nature, and therefore increasingly require more time to investigate and respond than the 5-day timescale;
 - An increasing number of enquiries require site visits to be arranged or for officers to contact other services / agencies / customers which can cause a delay in providing a response if these contacts / visits are not able to be made within the timescales;
 - Some services require written consent to be granted from the customer before information can be provided to an Elected Member;
 - Some customers contact multiple elected members about the same issue and often use multiple channels of communication which can make it difficult to coordinate responses in a timely manner;
 - Some enquires are sent directly to individual officers for a response rather than through identified channels. This can cause difficulties if the officer is off sick or on leave.
- 4.7 From the table above, Environment and Communities handles the largest number of enquiries from elected members. The profile in terms of numbers handled is very similar to that for complaints, and broadly reflects the volume of services being delivered. During 2017/18, Environment & Communities directly received approximately 8,000 enquiries and contacts in the form of service requests, complaints, insurance claims, data protection enquiries from members of the public which required a written response.

- 4.8 The above excludes service requests either direct to the Customer Service Centre (for streetscene, refuse collection, special uplifts, roads & lighting) or from Housing for repairs.
- 4.9 During the same Environment & Communities received over 5,200 enquiries from elected members. The main areas concerned:
- Roads & Transportation
 - Street Scene / Land Services
 - Waste Services
 - Community Safety
 - The above figures excludes services such as warden calls, EHO and Trading Standard cases, road permits etc which are dealt with separately.

5. Proposed process improvements

- 5.1 In terms of key findings flowing from the initial review conducted by the Head of Policy and Commissioning, it is suggested that several key issues require to be addressed in consultation with elected members:

Target to respond within 5 working days

The current 5 day working target for responding to elected member enquiries has been in place for a number of years. The volume, complexity and methods of contact have changed considerably in the intervening period, as have the requirements of elected members and the structure of Council services themselves.

- 5.2 The current approach to handling elected member enquiries is not currently aligned with the Council's complaints procedure, which requires frontline complaints to be resolved within 5 days, whilst more complex matters requiring investigation should be responded to within 20 days. The ability to streamline complaints in this way has promoted more effective and timely complaints handling within the organisation, ensuring resources can be directed to addressing low level complaints quickly, and allowing an appropriate amount of time for investigation to take place in relation to more complex complaints. Applying this type of approach to the handling of elected member enquiries, could ensure that elected members received a more prompt response to enquiries.
- 5.3 In order for a two stage process to be successful, strong communication would be required between officers and elected members. Officers would continue to demonstrate that elected member enquiries were a high priority for the service, and would timeously communicate the anticipated response time to the relevant

elected member and agree next steps. An extended response time would be applicable to those enquiries which were more complex or required investigation by officers. Guidance setting out principles for this approach could be developed to support the process.

Proposal: - Consider introduction of a two-stage process for the handling of elected member enquiries. The first stage would allow for low level enquiries to be responded to within 5 working days. This may include:- a service request or the provision of or signposting to available information. Stage 2 would allow services up to 10 days to investigate complex matters involving specific members of staff, contractors or to conduct site visits. The focus of services would be to respond to members quickly, with up to 10 days allocated to respond where there is necessary through agreement with the relevant member.

Streamlining the process

- 5.3 As noted in section 4.2 above, the review indicated that there are a range of different processes and contact routes for elected members to make enquiries across services. There is no single system used to record and monitor enquiries and related performance. This creates inefficiencies for both elected members and services, and it is clear that a different approach is required to ensure effective and efficient resolution of enquiries. Whilst elected members may wish to contact individual officers in relation to particular issues, at times this can elongate the process and also reduces oversight in terms of monitoring the timescale for response by senior management teams.

It is proposed that work is undertaken to develop options for a single system, including opportunities to link to other systems if this is possible, such as the Caseworker system. Any potential single process or system should facilitate better tracking of enquiries for both elected members and services.

Proposal: - Consider implementation of a single process and system to be used for recording and monitoring elected member enquiries. Specifically this could involve considering the opportunity to establish a single corporate point of contact for elected member enquiries.

Enhancing the level of information available to elected members

- 5.4 A presentation was provided to elected members in April 2018 as part of the member development week on the topic of “Handling Constituent Enquiries”. Within the session, officers discussed some of the

information set out in this report and explored some of the key areas of enquiries from elected members with a focus on supporting the effective resolution of constituent enquiries. It was clear from the discussions that more could be done by services to make information more readily available to elected members, including some of the options that could be used to “self-serve” in terms of addressing enquiries from constituents, where it is appropriate to do so. Examples of this may be submitting online referrals or service requests directly to service teams, promoting the availability of service level information at ward level and providing access to Council policies etc in a central location. There may be opportunities to develop FAQs covering common areas of enquiry for example.

Proposal:- Consider options for enhancing the information available to elected members, signposting to existing resources and exploring further opportunities for elected members to self-serve in terms of directing service requests through specific routes rather than via Directors.

- 5.5 Members of the board are invited to consider these proposals for discussion.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
3. **Community/Council Planning** – None
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights**
 - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals’ human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report, as it

has been prepared for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – none.
9. **Procurement** – none.
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none.
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – none.

List of Background Papers

- (a) n/a

Author: Laura McIntyre, Head of Policy and Commissioning, 0141 618 6807

To: Cross Party Sounding Board

On: 6 June 2018

Report by: Director of Finance & Resources

Heading: Review of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report advises that the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils (the Scheme) is being reviewed and sets out the statutory procedures to be followed to amend the Scheme.
 - 1.2 With regard to changing circumstances and representations already received (as set out in paragraphs 3.4 and 4.9), the Cross Party Sounding Board is invited to consider possible amendments to the Scheme, including the funding formula used to determine annual administration allowances and the introduction of a complaints process for community councils.
 - 1.3 At this early stage, community councils have also been invited to attend informal focus group meetings to review the Scheme and suggest possible amendments, including the introduction of a complaints process.
 - 1.4 Proposed amendments will be set out in a Draft Scheme for consideration by the Council later in the year. Subject to formal approval, the Draft Scheme will be published for statutory public consultation and Councillors, community councils and all other interested parties will be invited to make representations on the proposed amendments.
 - 1.5 Once statutory public consultation is exhausted a final report setting out a revised Scheme will be submitted to the Council in due course.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the intention to review the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils and the procedure for undertaking the review be noted;
 - 2.2 That the Board considers possible changes to the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils, including the proposal to introduce a complaints procedure for community councils.
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3. Reviewing and Amending the Scheme

- 3.1 The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (the Act) places a duty on the Council to have in place a Scheme detailing the provisions it will make to establish and support community councils in its area.
- 3.2 The Scheme sets out arrangements for community council: boundaries; elections; membership; meetings; level of annual grant; liability; suspension and dissolution and includes the Constitution and Standing Orders to apply to community councils, together with a Code of Conduct for community council members and a summary of expectations.
- 3.3 Having regard to changing circumstances, and any representations received, the Council also has a duty to keep the content and provisions of its Scheme under review. The last review was conducted during 2014 and a revised Scheme was adopted by the Council in February 2015.
- 3.4 Since then the following has occurred:
 - 3.4.1 A new community council has been established in the area specified in the Scheme as Craigielea Community Council. Residents advised that the area was more commonly known to them as Ferguslie and requested that the community council area be renamed “Ferguslie Community Council”. It was agreed that this change would be included in the Scheme document at the next review.
 - 3.4.2 Citing difficulty recruiting and retaining residents as members and confusion with the local authority, some community councils have requested scope to remove “Council” from their title.
 - 3.4.3 Some community councils have requested that the Scheme at paragraph 3.8.1 better define “be ...non-political”.
 - 3.4.4 The use of social media by community councils has increased.
 - 3.4.5 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has been introduced and helps communities to do more for themselves and have more say in decisions that affect them.

- 3.4.6 A representation has been received, from the Scottish Government Minister for Communities & Housing, encouraging the Council to consider the introduction of a complaint process for community councils when it next reviews its Scheme. (See appendix).
- 3.5 In terms of the Act, before the Scheme can be revised or amended, the Council must agree that it ought to be amended, give public notice of its proposals to amend the Scheme and invite community councils and the public to make representations as respects the proposals. A meeting of the Council, convened for that purpose only, must agree to this, by two-thirds majority of those present and voting.
- 3.6 Therefore, to commence the review process, a Draft Scheme is being prepared setting out proposed amendments for consideration at the Council meeting convened for that purpose. Early discussions with community councils and relevant Council services are taking place to inform the content of the Draft Scheme.
- 3.7 Subject to the necessary Council approval, a first phase of statutory public consultation on the content and provision of the Draft Scheme will be carried out over eight weeks. Community councils, community planning partners, local area committees and all other interested parties will be invited to make representation on the proposed changes at that time.
- 3.8 At the end of the consultation period, a report will be submitted to the Council detailing representations received. Should representations include further proposals for amendment, these can be accepted or rejected by the Council.
- 3.9 If accepted, a second phase of public consultation, on an amended Draft Scheme must be carried out. No new material can be introduced.
- 3.10 Thereafter, the Council can resolve, at a meeting for that purpose only, to approve the content of the Draft Scheme or the duly amended Draft Scheme, as its final Scheme. The resolution requires a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.
- 3.11 It is anticipated that a final Scheme will be in place before the next Council-wide elections to community councils that are held every four years and are currently scheduled to take place in August/September 2019. The Director of Finance & Resources has discretion, in terms of the Scheme, to determine when Council-wide elections to community councils are held.

4. Community Councils in Renfrewshire

- 4.1 Community councils have a duty to represent all residents in their area and to do so with fairness and equality. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 Section 51(2) provides this definition:

“In addition to any other purpose which a community council may pursue, the general purpose of a community council shall be to ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area, and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents, in relation to matters for which those

authorities are responsible, and to take such action in the interests of that community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable”

- 4.2 There are 25 community council areas in Renfrewshire. The geographical boundaries of each area were determined by residents’ understanding of their own ‘natural’ community boundaries. To date, the Council has maintained the status quo in relation to community council boundaries, unless representations for change have been made by residents in the affected area and any affected neighbouring community council also agrees to the change.
- 4.3 At present, 21 community councils are active, representing approximately 150,750 residents and 4 are inactive leaving approximately 24,150 without community council representation.
- 4.4 295 residents are members of their local community council. Members are volunteers who have been elected “unopposed” to represent their area. Contested elections are held only where there are more candidates for election than places available on the community council. Membership is open to residents who live in the area, are registered to vote, and are 16 or over.
- 4.5 Community councils have a Constitution and Standing Orders that have been approved by Renfrewshire Council and operate a voluntary Code of Conduct for Members of Community Councils (the Code of Conduct) that sets out standards of behaviour expected of members.
- 4.6 The voluntary Code of Conduct was introduced by the Scottish Government in 2009 as part of its national “model Scheme” with guidance that the Code of Conduct was to be self-regulating. Community councils can investigate alleged breaches of this Code and determine the sanctions to apply. The Scottish Government is silent on what constitutes a complaint about a community council or a community council member, the method of investigation and the sanctions, if any, to be applied.
- 4.7 However, other local authorities have introduced a complaints process for community councils and the Scottish Government Minister for Communities & Housing has written to all local authorities encouraging the introduction of a complaints process, citing the procedures put in place by East Renfrewshire Council and Moray Council as examples.
- 4.8 Informally, community councils in Renfrewshire have indicated that they are divided on the need to introduce a complaints process. While some will welcome this opportunity to investigate and resolve complaints in a consistent manner, others are highly critical of its introduction particularly as members are volunteers many of whom have no knowledge or experience of investigating and resolving complaints. For these reasons, the matter is likely to be contentious.
- 4.9 The Council provides an annual administration allowance to each community council towards running costs, based on the formula; £600 + 3p per head of population – annual allowances range from £617 to £1,256. Currently, the total budget for annual administration allowances is £20,247. The Board is invited to consider possible amendments to this formula.

4.10 The level of annual administration grant provided by our three comparator Councils is:

Dundee City Council	£330 + 1.2p per head of population
Clackmannanshire Council	£400 for each CC with population less than 3000 and £600 for all others
North Lanarkshire Council	£350 + £9 per 100 electorate

4.11 Direct comparisons with the provisions and support provided to community councils by other Scottish local authorities is not possible given the diversities of size and scale, the levels of direct and indirect funding, and the resources available to provide direct and indirect support.

4.12 As well as their own fundraising initiatives, community councils can apply for local area committee grants and to external sources for funding towards local improvement projects for their communities.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – A proposed increase to the funding formula that determines annual administration grants will require to be resourced.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None.
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
 - *Our Renfrewshire is fair* - Community councils represent all residents in their area with fairness and equality and, although not part of local government, are considered the first tier of local democracy.
 - *Our Renfrewshire is safe* – Community councils contribute towards keeping residents safe and, to help them do so, have developed strong working relationships with local community police and warden services.
 - *Reshaping our place, our economy and our future* – Community councils are statutory consultees on planning matters.
 - *Building strong, safe and resilient communities* – As advocates for their neighbourhoods, community councils have developed strong working relationships with all public sector providers and help to plan services and communicate those plans to residents.
4. **Legal** – None.
5. **Property/Assets** – None.
6. **Information Technology** – None.
7. **Equality & Human Rights**

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – None.
9. **Procurement** – None.
10. **Risk** – None.
11. **Privacy Impact** - None
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – None.

List of Background Papers:

- (a) Renfrewshire Council Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils (2015)

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