

By: Mr P B Carter, Leader of the Council,
Dr M R Eddy, Leader of the Labour Group
Mrs T Dean, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

To: County Council – 11 December 2008

Subject: Informal Member Group report on Member Information

Summary: This report provides for the County Council a summary of the work of the Informal Member Group on Members Information and the views of the Selection and Member Services Committee consideration of the report on 26 November 2008.

Introduction

1. (1) An Informal Member Group (IMG) on Member Information was established by the Selection and Member Services Committee at its meeting on 10 October 2007. The IMG was chaired by Mrs T Dean who was joined by Mr J Davies, Vice Chairman of the County Council and Mr R Parker, representing the Labour Group.

(2) The purpose of the IMG was to respond to the County Council Policy decision of 23 March 2006 that the Information Point should co-ordinate a Member Information service across the County Council. The IMG also wished to assess the issue of Member satisfaction with the quality and quantity of information they receive, particularly in respect of individual electoral divisions. These issues were raised in survey to Members conducted by the three political group whips last year.

Terms of Reference

2. (1) The Terms of Reference for the IMG were:-

- To explore what facilities Members require in terms of information processes and product, to enable each Member to discharge their role as a County Councillor;
- To explore best practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom in Information Management i.e. delivering the right information to the right person at the right time; and
- To recommend to the Selection and Member Services Committee how County Council policy can best be implemented, to ensure the Information Point is the focal point for Member Information.

(2) Soon after the work of the IMG commenced it became apparent that consultants had been appointed to undertake a similar piece of work. The consultants, RSe, reported their outcome to the project sponsors for the consultancy piece of work, the Chief Officers Group at the beginning of July 2008 and the IMG's preliminary conclusions were shared with RSe Consultancy.

(3) In conducting their review, the IMG:-

- visited other authorities;
- viewed alternative systems;
- interviewed Officers within KCC's Information Systems Group;
- initiated a Member survey of information sources and preferred ways of receiving information; and
- held a Member Workshop to identify information needs on a future Members Portal.

(4) This resulted in the IMG reaching a number of conclusions which cover broadly two distinct but related areas of information:-

- (a) external, Government and partner related body information; and
- (b) local authority information held by the County Council and Borough and District Councils.

(5) The summary of the recommendations arising from the deliberations of the IMG is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. Any Member requiring a copy of the full report can obtain this from margaret.wickens@kent.gov.uk. A number of copies of the full report have been placed in the Members Lounge.

(6) The IMG noted that of the 31 options for improvement identified in the RSE Consultancy report, seven were given greater priority, with the following recommendations made in order of desirability based on cost, functionality and strategic fit:-

- (a) employ a single Corporate Information Champion;
- (b) create a Council-wide map of all information elements;
- (c) set information gathering approval and storage processes;
- (d) match information gathering and analysis resources to priorities mood;
- (e) promote information provision services;
- (f) improve KNet; and
- (g) enhance Information Management training.

(7) It should be noted that the report of the IMG Member Information is one of a package of work streams featured on the County Council agenda today, including some of the recommendations of the Select Committee Accessing Democracy and the ongoing work of the IMG: Member Development.

Selection and Member Services Committee

3. (1) The Selection and Member Services Committee considered the full report of the IMG at its meeting on 26 November 2008. A summary of the Selection and Member Services Committee debate is attached as Appendix 2.

(2) If the recommendations are approved by the County Council then the Selection and Member Services Committee has asked to receive regular reports in the new year on progress made in implementing the recommendations. Before this and on the assumption that the County Council approve the report the Selection and Member Services Committee asked for the recommendations to be costed for further discussion with the three Group Leaders and the Chief Officers Group.

Recommendation

4. We commend the recommendations of the IMG as set out in Appendix 1 to this report to the County Council for approval.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INFORMAL MEMBER GROUP:
MEMBER INFORMATION**

R1. A Head of Information Management be appointed reporting to the Chief Executive.

R2. It is recommended that to address the complex nature of Member Information, a collaborative management board for the Information Point be set up.

R3. An urgent audit of staff engaged in Information Management across the authority be carried out, and duplication of processes and output be eliminated.

R4 Time released by eliminating duplication is invested in increased analysis, archiving and proactive reporting of information to assist members.

R5. Members' induction should encompass the rights of members to information, and the services available at the Information Point in depth, and interviews with each member arranged to determine their needs, with the option for Members to review their needs at least every six months.

R6. A Local Member Notification Protocol be developed, and electronic alerts introduced to systems, indicating when members need to be consulted and informed and by whom, with current contact details.

R7. A Members' Focus Group be set up to produce a list of information members require continuously 'on tap' on their Members' database. (See Appendix D for suggested content). An Information Protocol is prepared which sets out contact details for named individuals within the Directorates who are responsible for providing and updating this information, and sets out how their work fits in with the work of the Information Point

R8. An electronic Members' 'portal' or dashboard be developed to give easy access to the information requested in R7. The portal should be trialled by the Members' Focus Group to ensure it meet Members' needs.

R12. Member training should include research skills, and the use of electronic tools to enhance their effectiveness and information exchange with residents.

R13. All member training sessions be recorded, put on the portal, and marketed.

R14. KNet be improved, with easier navigation, an improved search engine, and regular updating of information.

R15. The Kent Partnership Board be encouraged as a matter of urgency to progress work on sharing of information and use of compatible systems to facilitate this.

R16. This IMG or a successor body be charged with driving through the actions agreed from this report, and that quarterly reports are submitted to the Selection and Member Services Committee on progress.

**SUMMARY OF THE SELECTION AND MEMBER SERVICES COMMITTEE'S
DISCUSSION OF THE REPORT BY THE INFORMAL MEMBER GROUP ON MEMBER
INFORMATION**

(1) The Selection and Member Services Committee met on Wednesday, 26 November 2008. It was attended by Mrs P A V Stockell (Chairman), Mr P B Carter, Mr J A Davies, Dr M R Eddy, Ms A Harrison, Mr A J King, Mr K G Lynes and Mr M J Vye.

(2) Mrs Dean presented the report from the Informal Member Group (IMG), whose Members had been Mrs Dean, Mr Davies and Mr Parker.

(3) Mrs Dean outlined the report and then explained that the IMG had made 16 recommendations of which the first two were considered the most important. These were:

Recommendation 1: A Head of Information Management is appointed reporting to the Chief Executive. Prime duties of this post holder would be to ensure that information is managed as a corporate resource, that officers work as a coordinated network and that IP staff and members receive in a timely and user friendly manner the information to which they are entitled in law and which they require to carry out their jobs.

Recommendation 2: In order to address the complex nature of Member Information, a collaborative management board for the Information Point be set up – comprising a Member from each political party, a library manager and the Head of Democratic Services. Staff within the Information Point should ideally be dedicated posts, and the unit be positioned as a corporate resource. Staff should be seconded into Democratic Services Unit from Library and Information Services – to ensure the continuity of training and professional support links currently available from the Libraries Unit are maintained. Line Management should sit with the Head of Democratic Services, disputes being referred to the Director of Legal Services who is also the Monitoring Officer responsible for ensuring Members' legal rights to information are enforced.

A Service Level Agreement should therefore be put in place between the Chief Executive and the Libraries Service to ensure that:

The public library catalogue can still be used to record all materials held at the Information Point and thus facilitate continued access to the catalogue from any pc with the Internet.

All library databases and subscriptions, currently used, can be accessed by the Information Point staff.

(1) In support of the recommendations, Mrs Dean said that the Chief Executive of West Sussex County Council had informed the IMG that his Authority had developed a "Local Member Notification Protocol" which ensured that all Officers involved in the Information area worked together as a team. The result had been that no complaints had been made about the lack of information available to Local Members for a very long time.

(2) The IMG recommended that KCC's information technology should become more available and accessible for Local Members. This included abandonment of the "googling" system in favour of "filed down" information. The Information Point (TIP) staff had the skills to achieve this but did not have the time resources to do so.

(3) Mrs Dean referred to the RSe Consultancy report, which had been prepared for the Chief Officer Group (COG) meeting in June 2008. The IMG report had agreed with each of its recommendations. She expressed disappointment that COG had not supported their Recommendation 1. She believed that it was crucial for this to happen, as this was the most effective way to enable the rest of the recommendations to be put into practice.

(4) Mr King congratulated all the Members of the IMG on their excellent analysis. He agreed that most of the recommendations needed to be given serious consideration. It was essential that Local Members of all parties were in a position to respond rapidly to local concerns. The fundamental question posed by this report was where within the County Council TIP should sit. This was not a question that the Selection and Member Services Committee should answer.

(5) Mr Davies said that he had a disagreement with Recommendation 2 in that he would prefer to see an advisory as opposed to a management board. He was particularly committed to the development of a Members' portal (Recommendation 8) and had been impressed with the successful system operated by Westminster Council.

(6) Mrs Dean stressed that the recommendations should be acted upon at the earliest opportunity, rather than waiting until the new Council in June.

(7) Ms Harrison suggested that the SDU and Public Access Unit could be given responsibility for organising Members' access to information. She agreed with the webcasting of training (Recommendation 13) as experience had shown that Members were often far too busy to attend training sessions (even if they were duplicated).

(8) Mr Vye commented that what interested Members was raw facts and the direction of travel. A very good format would be to present this information at both a constituency and wider district level.

(9) Mr Carter said that he welcomed the recommendations set out in the report. The next step should be to establish what information should be generic to every Member. They would need to be empowered to identify their needs. Care would also need to be taken to manage Members' expectations to ensure that the cost of implementation did not spiral out of control.

(10) Mr King saw the process as one of the agreement of the County Council to the principles of the report. A system should then be developed which enabled Officers and Members to provide and be provided with the information to which they would be reasonably and realistically entitled.

(11) Mr Wild, the Director of Law and Governance said that the key task was to speedily develop a cost-effective mechanism in consultation with ISG, Public Access and Members.

(12) Dr Eddy agreed with Mrs Dean and Mr Davies that duplication needed to be eliminated and that a Head of Information Management needed to be appointed. He said that it was essential that one person within the organisation took overall responsibility.

(13) Mrs Stockell suggested that much of the development work could be undertaken by the Member Development IMG monitoring of progress. This would negate the need for a separate Focus Group duplication.

(14) Mr King said that the question of whether to set up a Focus Group and/or Management Board would need further consideration once the views of the County Council were known. This matter should be further discussed in the interim report to Selection Committee on 23 January.