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To: Selection and Member Services Committee – 26 January 2015

Subject: Recording an Elected Member's contribution to the County Council

Summary: This report invites the committee to consider the options for the recording of the contribution by elected Members to the County Council.

1. Introduction

As part of my response to a question from Mr Whybrow at the County Council meeting on 11 December, I indicated to the Council that I would be inviting this committee to consider a range of options on ways in which an elected member can reflect the total contribution they make to the Council and to ensure that this is available to the public.

2. Role of the Elected Member

- (1) The role of the elected Member is many and varied so recording the contribution that an elected Member makes to the County Council as a whole and the electoral division they represent can be equally very different. For example in addition to their general constituency work:
 - (a) A Member will be appointed to serve on a number of the Council committees. Depending on the other commitments a Member may have that may be only one or two but could be six or more;
 - (b) Many Members will also have been appointed to one or a number of outside bodies as the County Council's representative;
 - (c) 31 of the 84 Members are also Members of a district council for a ward which forms part of their County Council electoral division; and
 - (d) Many of the Members live in an electoral Division which has a number of parish councils and the Member will attend parish council meetings on a regular basis.
- (2) The activities in paragraph 2(1) do not reflect the additional responsibilities of elected Members who hold an 'office' and are in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance, e.g. Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Members, Chairmen of Committees and Leaders of the Opposition Groups for Groups of 5 or more members.

- (3) These roles are equally very different and varied and range from an in depth knowledge of a particular service delivery area e.g. for Cabinet Members their respective portfolio and Committee Chairman i.e. the Chairman of the Planning Applications Committee or the Regulation Committee, to the Leader of the Council who has an in depth knowledge of the whole Council and the services it delivers. The Leader also works on national and regional networks and works with Kent MPs, government ministers and others to influence the national political agenda.

3. Mechanisms for recording and publishing the contribution of elected Members

(1) *Attendance records at formal Council and committee meetings*

Member attendance at formal meetings of the Council is recorded through the electronic system for the publication of agendas, reports and minutes. This information remains available to any Members who request it but it is no longer published on the website due to Member's concerns that it did not accurately reflect what they do.

(2) *Annual Report*

Prior to the election in 2013, Members routinely prepared and published an annual report. Just prior to the election this was prepared electronically on a render form attached at **Appendix 1**. A copy of my report using this render form is attached at **Appendix 2**. If Member's were minded to re-introduce an Annual Report, or a limited version of an Annual Report core information required could be supplied by the Member Support staff. This would include:

- (a) The name of the Member and the electoral Division they represent and how long they have represented that Division;
- (b) The contact details and biographical information held by the County Council for the elected Member;
- (c) The committees to which the Member has been appointed;
- (d) The outside bodies to which the Member has been appointed to represent the County Council; and
- (e) How the Member has allocated the Combined Member Grant and Member Highway Fund.

If Members wished to add to this core information there would be the facility to:

- (a) Provide some further background information about themselves; and
- (b) Detail their key achievements for the past year and their ambitions for the forthcoming year.

(3) *Newsletters*

Several Members already prepare and distribute a newsletter to the constituents they represent. The frequency for these newsletters varies from quarterly to an annual basis.

(4) *Parish council meetings and attendance at meetings of other organisations within a Member's electoral division*

Where Members represent an electoral division that has a number of parish councils, Members attend many of their meetings and report on a regular basis to update the parish council and the parishioners on issues within the parish from a County Council perspective.

Members also regularly attend meetings of other organisations within their electoral division, which provides a further opportunity to update the organisation on their activity as a County Councillor.

(5) *Blog*

It is understood that some elected Members have a private blog. A blog presents an opportunity to let the public know on a regular basis the contribution they are making as a County Councillor. To be effective, it does need to be made on a regular basis, as, it is likely that a number of residents will follow an individual Member's blog. It would be possible to provide on the KCC website a link to a Member's private blog. However, the County Council would wish to add a disclaimer that it accepts no responsibility for the content of the blog.

(6) *Social media*

Social media also provides an instantaneous way of engaging with any person who wishes to follow an individual, for example on Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Whilst social media is an instantaneous form of communication, if Members were to use this medium as a form of engagement, the County Council would wish to provide guidance to Members on the use of social media as well as providing some bespoke training.

4. Conclusion

- (1) This report has set out for the Committee's discussion a range of ways in which Members do or could record their contribution to the County Council.
- (2) However, for transparency, having a Member's contribution recorded and accessed from the Members page on the County Council website represents the preferred way forward. If the Committee supports this view as the best way forward, then reaching agreement on the most effective mechanism and template for recording this information so that it is consistent across the County Council is key.

5. Recommendation

The views of the Committee are sought.

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