

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Communities
Gary Cooke, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Democratic Services

To: Selection and Member Services Committee – 27 September 2016

Subject: Information Point and Members' Area

1. Introduction

- (1) Following staffing redesign proposals put forward by Libraries, Registration & Archives (LRA) a number of Members raised concerns about proposed changes to the staffing of the LRA's Information Services Team that would affect the Information Point (the Wickham Room).
- (2) In response to the concerns raised, both Mr Hill and Mr Cooke reflected and reviewed the original proposals put forward. As a result of this a new joint approach is being proposed that looks at Member services as a whole.

2. Background

- (1) Members of the Committee will be aware that achieving efficiencies in service delivery and savings is an ongoing challenge for the Council and no area of the Council's activities must be overlooked in terms of potential savings. All areas of service delivery are being reviewed and in the context of KCC becoming a commissioning authority it is correct that a regular review of services takes place to ensure they are still delivering the right outcomes and the best possible value for money. Savings and efficiencies must be made in order for the Medium Term Financial Plan targets to be achieved.
- (2) As Cabinet Member for the Libraries, Registration and Archives service, Mike Hill the Cabinet Member and Barbara Cooper the Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport undertook a staff consultation, which contained a proposal which potentially affected the staffing of the Information Services Team. This was in the context of a wider restructure of LRA which was proposed would save Kent County Council £250K revenue costs.
- (3) For the Committee's information, there are currently four LRA members of staff who, as part of the Information Services Team, as well as providing the Ask a Kent Librarian (AKL) service to the general public also provide the Information Point during a normal working week, with only ever one member of staff on duty at any one time.

3. Information Point

- (1) The Committee will be aware that for a number of years, the Information Point has been viewed by elected members and, in particular, those Members who do not have any dedicated support, as one of the key areas of support for finding information, particularly if it is to do with local or central government. The Information Point also provides a valuable library research and summary service, which is appreciated by elected Members
- (2) The Information Point (TIP) supports the authority, individual Members, committees and the officers who support them through the provision of information and library services. For example:
 - A dedicated confidential and impartial enquiry service – TIP responds to enquiries submitted directly by Council Members or KCC officers face-to-face at the Wickham room in Sessions House, by phone or email
 - TIP does not carry out in-depth research or analysis; staff may document pros and cons for a particular issue as described in the resources used (referencing them as such), but do not provide opinion or recommendations. As with the Ask a Kent Librarian general public service work is limited to 'soft research'- the gathering/compilation of data and information and/or signposting to resources/sources relevant to the user enquiry (the level and depth of which are discussed and assessed as part of the enquiry process).
 - The Information Point also contains a number of computers and workstations, which several non-executive members use as their preferred location when they are in County Hall on Council business.
 - Current awareness monitoring (including Parliamentary business)
 - The Daily Digest is a distillation of relevant news and developments from a wide selection of websites - government departments, think tanks, pressure groups, newspapers and specialist media.
 - The Member Information Bulletin, issued weekly, is a compilation of daily Digest material together with decisions, information on committees, consultations and other KCC information aimed at Councillors.

- 'Special bulletins' are issued to summarise points covered in the Queen Speech, Budget and Autumn Statement, as well as covering election results.
 - Consultation monitoring: TIP compiles a database of current consultations which is used to alert Cabinet and CMT when KCC may need to write a response.
 - Maintain mailing lists of district councillors, mayors, leaders etc. (KCC colleagues use them for mailshots).
 - Small selection of quick reference, reports and statistical volumes
 - Access to LRA-funded online subscription and support for corporate procurement of subscriptions
 - Periodicals, national and local newspapers
 - Hot-desking facilities: phone, workstations printing/copying/scanning and study space
 - Signposting to and/or liaison with other KCC (e.g. Public Health & Social Care Library, Research and Evaluation Team...) and external providers of data and information
 - Document supply (books, reports, articles) through the LRA system
 - Induction training and support with search skills and basic IT issues
 - Professional advice e.g. copyright & licensing, sourcing and use of official publications etc.
 - Access point for LRA library services: joining, reservations (including Inter-library loans), pick up and return of library items. 53 people have the Information Point as their home branch. The Information Point issued 402 items in 2014/15 and 767 in 2015/16.
- (3) The Information Point operates the face-to-face service from the Wickham room 5 days a week - Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm (except for Bank, national holidays and the week between Christmas and New Year).

- (4) In addition, phone and email services are covered remotely for a one hour lunchbreak and 5 to 6pm on week days, Saturdays 9am to 5pm and during the week between Christmas and New Year.

Levels of use of the Information Point for 2016/17 to date

Month	Visitors	Average daily visitor (to the nearest person)	Average Hourly Visitor (to the nearest person)
April	109	5	1
May	105	5	1
Jun	131	6	1
Jul	126	6	1

Total enquiries handled by the Information Services Team in 2015/16 by source

Source	2015/16
Company	369
Contact Centre	3,161
Council Member	159 See note 2
KCC	343
Individual	4,670
Libraries	449
Grand Total	9,151

- (5) Of these, the council member and KCC enquiries could be considered as Information Point enquires, which make up approximately 5.5% of the Information Services Team enquiries.

4. Member Support

- (1) The location of the Information Point close to the Members' lounge and Members' desk was deliberate in providing Members with an opportunity to access support in a central location to assist them in discharging their role.
- (2) The Committee will be aware that there are many other officers from whom Members receive direct support once they are called upon e.g. ICT, self –service for Members expenses etc.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- (1) Having listened very carefully to what Members have said as the responsible portfolio holders, we have discussed the opportunities for a more imaginative use of the Members' area around the Members Desk, Members' Lounge and Information Point.
- (2) Bearing in mind the ongoing efficiencies and savings that the Committee will appreciate have to be made, we propose to commission a piece of work with the existing cohort of members so that we can fully understand what they as elected members require in the way of support. This will be from the perspective of the existing Members' Desk and Information Point
- (3) To do this we will undertake a focussed survey of all elected Members before convening the existing cross-party Member Development Group to discuss the outcomes of the survey and make recommendations to the Cabinet Members. We will also look at what other local authorities are doing to learn from practice elsewhere.
- (4) Our intention is to report back to this Committee in the new-year with proposals for the more imaginative use of the Members' area. The intention will be to put in place any changes following the election in May 2017.

6. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to agree to the:

- (a) commissioning of a survey of all elected Members on Member support;
- (b) researching what other local authorities do so that we can learn from best practice elsewhere; and
- (c) invite the existing cross-party Member Development Group to consider their views on Member support once the outcome of the survey is known and make recommendations to the Cabinet Members accordingly, with a view to changes being put in place after the County Council elections in May 2017

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