



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

REPORT TO: Cabinet

26 July 2018

LEAD OFFICER: Head of People and Organisational Development

Preparing for 2018 and Beyond Task and Finish Group

Purpose

1. To outline the findings of the elected member “Preparing for 2018 and Beyond” Task and Finish Group.

This is a not a key decision.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Cabinet considers the findings and recommendations of the elected member “Preparing for 2018 and Beyond” Task and Finish Group.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The “Preparing for 2018 and Beyond” Task and Finish Group has carried out research and sought views on the impacts of the ward boundary changes and the change to 4-yearly elections for South Cambridgeshire District Council. The Task and Finish Group has also taken account of the recommendations from the Peer Review.
4. The recommendations are backed up by feedback from Parish Councils, outside bodies, South Oxfordshire District Council and the wider group of councillors, as well as research and information from the Local Government Association (LGA)

Executive Summary

5. This report outlines the recommendations of the “Preparing for 2018 and Beyond” Task and Finish Group which was set up, in the light of the Peer Review recommendations, to prepare for the outcomes following the elections to new ward boundaries and a reduction in the number of elected Members from 57 to 45.
6. In view of timing considerations, it was necessary to address some of the more operational issues discussed by the Task and Finish Group, such as review of the Ward Councillor role profile and the list of outside bodies, prior to the elections.

7. A summary of the recommendations is set out below:-

Recommendations
1. That the responses from South Oxfordshire District Council as set out in Appendix B be noted, in particular, the reference to the need regularly to review and evaluate the effectiveness of Member training.
2. That contact details for locality area officers and key and emergency contacts should be provided to Parish Councils.
3. That the streamlining of Council representation on outside bodies and the need to continue to keep such representation under review, be noted.
4. That political groups should be recommended, following each election, appoint a mentor for each newly elected councillor within their group to be a source of guidance and support.
5. That a Member Development Task and Finish Group be appointed to review the approach and direction of travel for Member Development.
6. That the Civic Affairs Committee be requested to establish a task and finish group to undertake a comprehensive review of the Constitution.
7. That the Civic Affairs Committee be invited to consider undertaking a review of the Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure.

9. With respect to recommendations 6 and 7 above, it should be noted that the Civic Affairs, at its meeting on 26 June 2018, agreed to establish a Member task and finish group to review the Constitution and Code of Conduct procedures.

Background

10. The "Preparing for 2018 and Beyond" Task and Finish Group was formed following the outcomes and recommendations from the Peer Review carried out in November 2016. The Peer Review team considered the implications for the Council in terms of ward boundary changes which came into effect at the elections in May 2018.
11. The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 30 October 2017 and met 7 times. The final meeting was held on 20 April 2018. All meetings were minuted.
12. Membership of the group was:
- Cllr Graham Cone (Chairman)
 - Cllr Henry Batchelor
 - Cllr Nigel Cathcart
 - Cllr Douglas de Lacey
 - Cllr Sue Ellington

Cllr Phillipa Hart
Cllr Sebastian Kindersley
Cllr Robert Turner

13. At its first meeting the group agreed its Terms of Reference, which can be found at Appendix A. The purpose of the group was “To ensure that new and existing elected members are supported in fulfilling their role as councillors following the Council’s first ‘all out’ elections in 2018”.

Considerations

14. The feedback and outcome report following the Peer Review, which took place in 2016, made a number of recommendations. Specifically, in relation to the ward boundary changes, the report states at Recommendation 12:

“Begin internal discussions on new ways of working following the boundary commission that reduces the number of members from 57 to 45 at the elections in May 2018. Devise new support and liaison arrangements that could optimise the new member roles”.

Discussions with South Oxfordshire District Council

15. Members of the Task and Finish Group expressed an interest in finding out how other local authorities had tackled these challenges. It was felt that it would be helpful to identify a council which bore similarities to South Cambridgeshire in terms of rural setting, linked closely to a city; similar in size and population and, with a similar growth agenda.
16. It was agreed that South Oxfordshire District Council was sufficiently similar as to provide a relevant insight.
17. Cllr Graham Cone, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, submitted a number of questions to elected members of South Oxfordshire District Council. The response received is attached at Appendix B.

Recommendation 1

That the responses from South Oxfordshire District Council as set out in Appendix B be noted, in particular, the reference to the need regularly to review and evaluate the effectiveness of Member training.

Parish Councils

18. The Task and Finish Group contacted all Parish Councils within the District to advise them of the changes to ward boundaries and the reduction in number of Councillors. The aim was to gather views on the role of their District Councillor and, to consider Parish Council expectations following the May 2016 elections. The Task and Finish Group received feedback from 28 Parish Councils.
19. The key themes raised by Parish Councils were:
 - An expectation that District Councillors will attend monthly meetings or the significant majority of those meetings.
 - A general preference for District Councillors to provide monthly written reports to Parish Councils (some Parish Councils specified that written reports will

only be required where the Councillor cannot attend the Parish Council meeting, however many would like both attendance at the meeting and a written report).

- A wish by some Parish Councils to have District Councillor attendance at bi-monthly/quarterly meetings with Parish Clerks and Chairmen to discuss local issues.
- The need for improved methods of communication between Council officers and Parish Clerks (e.g. provision of contact details and points of contact in the District Council for Parish Clerks).
- Where there is more than one District Councillor, a general preference for contact with the same District Councillor to provide consistency and continuity rather than a “revolving selection”.

Recommendation 2

That contact details for locality area officers and key and emergency contacts be provided to Parish Councils.

Representation on Outside Bodies

20. The Task and Finish Group recognised that Councillors have a wide variety and number of commitments as part of their role with the Council. The Group felt that it would be a timely opportunity to review the commitments to outside bodies to ensure the authority has appropriate levels of representation on bodies which have significant importance to the Council.
21. Cllr Sue Ellington contacted all district councillors to invite their feedback on the value of the outside bodies upon which they sat and whether the Council should continue to be represented on them.
22. The Task and Finish Group agreed that there was a need to review the list of outside bodies to ensure that continued representation by South Cambridgeshire Councillors was merited and represented value for money. It was acknowledged that there would be certain bodies where the Council’s continued representation would be important and that there might be other bodies where the Council provided financial support, in respect of which continued engagement at some level might be desirable.
23. Outside bodies were contacted in order to identify if the outside body was still in existence and, if so, to seek views on the level of district councillor involvement expected such as attendance at meetings or inclusion on circulation list for minutes.
24. As a result of the review and feedback from outside bodies, changes have been recommended to reduce the number of outside bodies to which the Council appoints representatives. These were presented at the Group Leaders meeting held following the election to consider appointments to committees and outside bodies. Recommendations were made to the Annual Council meeting regarding those bodies to which the Council should continue to make appointments and those where Council representation should be discontinued.

Recommendation 3

To note the streamlining of Council representation on outside bodies and the need to continue to keep such representation under review.

Promote Councillor Role

25. The Task and Finish Group felt it was important to consider the promotion of the role of district councillor to encourage greater diversity of representation from our communities.
26. Cllr Graham Cone held discussions with the Communications Team with a view to identifying a suitable approach using appropriate media. It was suggested that it should be possible to publish general publicity on the role of a Councillor and to include a link to the “Be a Councillor” website.
27. For the future, it was suggested that publicity could focus around some case studies for individual councillors on what being a councillor involved. However, realistically it was not possible to promote stories of individual councillors before the elections in May 2018 because of purdah.
28. As well as providing stories from individual councillors it was felt that information on councillor development, allowances and general support would be helpful to potential candidates. The group also felt that ‘Be a Councillor’ open days may provide opportunities for further engagement. This is an initiative which the Cabinet may wish to introduce for future elections.

Review of Role Profile for a District Councillor

29. The Council introduced a Member Toolkit some years ago, the previous version was dated 2014 although, some minor updates had been carried out during the intervening years.
30. The Group felt that the existing Councillor role profile in the Member Toolkit was out of date and did not reflect the new role, skills and demands expected from Councillors and, that a review, prior to May elections, would be timely.
31. Example role profiles were researched and a suitable format and content was identified by means of the Local Government Association. This template was modified following feedback from the Task and Finish Group.
32. The revised role profile was included in the Member Induction Pack following agreement by the Portfolio Holder responsible for Member Development.

New Councillor Induction Programme and Welcome Pack

33. The Task and Finish Group received and commented upon the Member Induction Day programme. It noted that a key aim of the induction day was to provide an informal opportunity for Members to network with each other and with officers. Members discussed the importance of ensuring that appropriate arrangements were in place after the elections to signpost new Councillors to appropriate officer contacts in the organisation. It was noted that Democratic Services Officers would act as “buddies” to new Members to help with their general queries and direct them to the relevant officers and teams. However the Task and Finish Group recognised that officers are not able to deal with the more political aspects of a councillor’s role. The group therefore felt that political groups should appoint mentors for newly elected councillors to help them find their way around the Council and “how things work around here”; how to deal with their ward councillor role and to generally be a source of guidance and encouragement. The relationship could last for as long as both parties agreed it was helpful.

Recommendation 4

34. **That political groups should be recommended, following each election, to appoint a mentor for each newly elected councillor within their group to be a source of guidance and support.**

Member Development Programme

33. The Task and Finish Group reviewed and supported the draft Member Development Programme. The need to evaluate and review the outcomes of training was acknowledged. It agreed that it was important that there should be a Member led review of the approach and direction of travel for Member Development; developing the four year Member Development Strategy for 2018/2022 and shaping and prioritising the Member Development Programme.

Recommendation 5

That a Member Development Task and Finish Group be appointed to review the approach and direction of travel for Member Development.

Constitution Review

34. The Task and Finish Group discussed whether any Constitutional amendments were required as a result of the implications of the reduction in the number of Councillors, including possibly reducing the number of seats on committees.
35. The Group received advice from the Deputy Monitoring Officer who recommended that any updating of the Constitution should be restricted to factual amendments at this stage and, noting that the Constitution had not been reviewed for some years, that a more root and branch review should follow the Council elections in May.

Recommendation 6:

That the Civic Affairs Committee be requested to establish a task and finish group to undertake a comprehensive review of the Constitution.

Code of Conduct Procedures

36. The Task and Finish Group received a report from Councillor Tony Orgee inviting it to consider whether to review the Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure and to make recommendations for changes to the Civic Affairs Committee. Councillor Orgee highlighted a number of areas of the current procedures where he suggested greater clarity and consistency were required and commented that there would be merit in reviewing the procedure in the light of experience and learning.
37. The Deputy Monitoring Officer also addressed the Task and Finish Group and whilst he felt the procedures were fit for purpose, acknowledged that they had now been in place for nearly 5 years and that there might therefore be merit in the Civic Affairs Committee considering such a review.
38. The Task and Finish Group concluded that it would not be appropriate for them to take the review forward but agreed to make the recommendation set out below.

Recommendation 7:

That the Civic Affairs Committee be invited to consider undertaking a review of the Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure.

Options

Cabinet could decide not to approve the recommendations or to amend them.

Implications

In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Resource Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However officer time will be needed to support the recommended review of the Constitution and Code of Conduct reviews.

Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

No background papers

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APPENDIX A

‘PREPARING FOR 2018 AND BEYOND’ TASK AND FINISH GROUP DRAFT FOR CONSIDERATION

Background

New district ward boundaries will come into effect at all out elections in May 2018 and the number of district councillors will reduce from 57 to 45.

Within existing arrangements the Council has been use to a small turnover of councillors on an annual basis, which has meant that existing councillors have been able to readily support new councillors and induction processes designed to accommodate current need. It is possible that the move to all out elections will mean that there are a greater number of new councillors elected every four years and as such it is essential to ensure that the induction process and training and development programme remain fit for purpose and that members are support into the future.

The reduction in the number of councillors will also mean that some elected members cover a larger geographic area and a greater number of parish councils. In order to support councillors effectively fulfil their role locally it would be beneficial to review current support mechanisms in relation to single points of contact, for example.

Aims and objectives

To ensure that new and existing elected members are supported in fulfilling their role as councillors following the Council’s first all out elections in 2018, through reviewing, preparing draft documentation, where applicable, and recommending changes to:

- the councillor induction process;
- the councillor training and development programme; and
- the current mechanisms that are in place to support district councillors and engage with parish councils.

Timescales (date of establishment, frequency of meetings, review and end)

Membership

- Cllr Cone (Chairman)
- Cllr Henry Batchelor
- Cllr Cathcart
- Cllr de Lacey
- Cllr Ellington
- Cllr Hart
- Cllr Kindersley
- Cllr Robert Turner

Accountability

The Task and Finish Group has no decision-making powers. It will make recommendations to Cabinet.

Roles and responsibilities and officer support

This is a member-led Task and Finish Group in which members will actively contribute to the review phase, including carrying out investigation into good practice elsewhere and canvassing the opinions of other councillors, and using their own experiences to shape recommendations from the group.

Officer support will be provided by the Head of People and Organisational Development and the Head of Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing.

Brief notes and action points will be captured at each meeting.

APPENDIX B

Councillor Task and Finish working group questions

Did you look at/review councillor commitments to outside bodies and how the level of councillor engagement with and, communication, these bodies was conducted? - *No*

Do you give advice or support to councillors as to how to communicate and work with multiple Parish Councils? - *No*

Did you change the structure of the Cabinet? i.e. reduce it in size? If so, how was the workload managed or distributed? *No – that is up to the Leader.*

Did you change the way induction and training was delivered to councillors? What was included in the induction day and any councillor handbooks? *Following the 2015 all-council elections the council undertook an induction programme which included training and support to develop the effectiveness of councillors in their different roles in order to make the decision making process more effective. The effectiveness of this programme is currently under review as preparation for 2019.*

Do you provide additional support to councillors given the increased workload i.e. training, team building, courses, working with officers etc.? *Councillors' training needs are reviewed regularly in order to help meet both individual development needs and general legislative requirements e.g. GDPR*

Did you introduce new technology to assist councillors in communicating with residents, officers and Parish Councils? If so, what form did this take i.e. software, apps and mobile devices etc? *No.*

Have you introduced a new councilor 'Buddy' arrangement? *Yes, with a member of staff.*

What are the key lessons learnt by South Oxfordshire in terms of the change to wards and reduction in councillors – what could SCDC learn from your experience (both good and bad):

- a) By Democratic Services
- b) councillors

The process ran smoothly from a democratic and councillor perspective. New councillors were elected for the new wards. No reference was made to the previous arrangements and no issues raised. For democratic we work with fewer councillors and have not encountered any issues arising from the reduction in councillor numbers or increase in ward size.