

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Director of Corporate Services

REPORT NUMBER: J39

TO: STRATEGY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 18 June 2009

MEMBER INVOLVEMENT AT WARD LEVEL

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To propose recommendations on how Member involvement at Ward level can be improved.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the actions and improvements proposed at paragraph 5.5 of this report be approved.

2.2 That the Committee makes a recommendation to Full Council that the Member/ Officer Protocol be amended with the insert attached at Appendix 1.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Business Risk No. 4 – Political Leadership & Governance. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Inability to provide strong leadership during a period of significant change leading to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Indecision/poor decision making▪ Mixed/ conflicting messages▪ Reputation of Council compromised.	Low	Marginal	The Council improves Member involvement at Ward level.

5. KEY INFORMATION

5.1 The purpose of this review is to strengthen Member involvement at Ward level through the provision of timely, relevant information on local issues, so they are able to be good community leaders.

- 5.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act emphasises the importance of Ward Members as community leaders and encourages their empowerment to deal with local issues. In order to do this, Ward Members need effective ward-based information and intelligence disseminated in a relevant and timely manner.
- 5.3 There already are systems in place to inform Members on local matters - for example, the publication of planning applications, decisions and enforcement cases. Officers also endeavour to ensure that Ward Members are kept informed of and involved in issues and developments within their area.
- 5.4 There is also data and statistics available at Ward level, but these are not easy to access or interpret.
- 5.5 The following actions and improvements are proposed:
1. **Strengthening project management principles** – officers are being encouraged and trained to identify potential projects at an early stage and, as part of the project planning process, give consideration to who should be involved, should be informed, is to be “won over”, or is to be given a monitoring role. This then needs to be set out in the project action plan.
 2. **The identification and maintenance of Ward data and statistics** – an officer group is currently setting out data and statistics that will allow the Council to understand its communities better. Wherever possible, this information will be presented at Ward level. Officers will also investigate how the information could be accessed through the Council’s GIS system.
 3. **The identification of documents, publications, reports and records to be disseminated to Ward level** – An Information Management Audit is being conducted that is creating a database of all the items produced or received by the Council. So far 1,100 items have been identified and the work is scheduled to be finished by the end of August. Certain items will then be “tagged” for Ward Member dissemination. The Information Management Task Group is monitoring the Audit and it is proposed that it gives initial consideration to the tagging exercise.
 4. **Amendments to report templates** – there are templates for Committee and Management Team reports. It is proposed that these are amended to include a section that explains what Member involvement there has been with the issue.
 5. **Strengthening the Communications Strategy** – the Strategy sets out the importance of having a communications plan for significant projects and initiatives. This will be amended to ensure greater prominence is given to Member involvement.
- 5.6 There is no doubt that the above will improve Member involvement at Ward level. But the biggest improvement will be made by ensuring that officers understand the relevance and importance of Member involvement at the right level and time; and that they understand how to go about securing this. Member involvement needs to be woven into the officers’ work – especially at a senior level. Other Councils have set out how Ward Members will be involved in the Council’s work as part of their Member/Officer Protocol. Babergh’s Protocol does not do this and it is proposed that it is amended to include the insert shown at Appendix 1 to this report.

6. **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Insert to Member/Officer Protocol.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

None.

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INSERT TO MEMBER/OFFICER PROTOCOL

The purpose of informing and consulting Ward Members is:

- To obtain information from Ward Members on the matter;
- To ensure that their views are recorded and taken into account;
- To make them aware of issues affecting their Wards so that wherever possible, they receive this information before hearing it from sources other than the Council.

Officers will at all times keep Members informed about issues that affect their Wards. This will include media releases. Officers will also advise Members at the earliest possible stage, of relevant developments or proposals. Over and above this general responsibility, officers will notify a Member that a report on any such matter is being tabled or discussed as soon as the decision to place that item on a committee work plan is taken, and discuss their involvement with them.

When officers are writing reports or making recommendations relating to specific Wards the relevant Ward Councillor will be consulted and the content of any written response included in it.

Officers will consider whether policy or briefing papers, or other topics being discussed with PLG, Task or Working Groups should be discussed with relevant Ward Members.

In using authority delegated to them, officers will consult local Members if they consider that a proposed decision or action is of a non-routine nature and is likely to significantly affect directly the Ward interests of a local Member. This does not apply to proposed decisions or actions that have a general effect throughout Babergh, or are of a routine nature covered by the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

Issues of a strategic nature will continue to be dealt with initially at PLG and Ward Members will either be contacted at the same time, or informed as soon as possible after PLG has met.

Whenever a public meeting is organised by the Council to consider a local issue, all the Members representing the Ward or Wards affected will as a matter of course be invited to attend the meeting.

Similarly, whenever the Council undertakes any form of consultative exercise on a local issue, the Ward Members will be notified at the outset of the exercise.

The Council recognises the importance of promoting the Ward role of Members. This protocol allows for Ward Members to be quoted in news releases and be a contact for the media on initiatives in their Ward that promote the policies and services of the Council.

Copies of correspondence to parish councils and local groups will always be sent to local Ward Members, unless the correspondence contains confidential information.

Whenever the Council receives a complaint via the Ombudsman, or a complaint through its Complaints Procedure that relates to a Ward matter, a copy of that complaint, together with the Council's response and, if appropriate, the Ombudsman's decision, will be forwarded to the appropriate Ward Members.