

RESEARCH REPORT

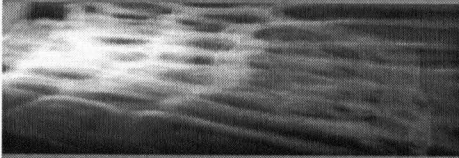
Perspectives on Multi-Member Ward working: Learning from experiences in Wales, England, Ireland and New Zealand

Andrew Morrison, Susan Reid
and Claire Lightowler

March 2007

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Foreword

On 3 May 2007, the local government elections in Scotland will, for the first time, be contested using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system. In Scotland, STV will result in the creation of larger three or four member electoral wards across the country, replacing the smaller, single-member wards that exist at present. This report examines how multi-member wards operate in Wales, England, Ireland and New Zealand. The research is based on interviews with 45 councillors, officials and local government stakeholders across the four countries.

The research reveals that if we do nothing in preparation for multi-member wards the system will encourage elected members to focus on fighting for profile and electoral advantage, both within and between political parties, often to the detriment of serving the community. However, this is by no means inevitable - councillors and councils have the opportunity to take measures to support successful multi-member ward working.

The key to successful multi-member ward working lies in ensuring that elected members collaborate by focusing on serving their community rather than constantly electioneering. This focus on the community is evident in close-knit communities in Ireland and Wales where councillors are well known to each other, and is the norm in New Zealand where political parties play little part in local government. In addition the research suggests that where wards are given a clear purpose and role ward members will be in a better position to rally together for the good of their community.

To give purpose to multi-member wards councils could exploit a range of possible roles for the multi-member ward. Possibilities include:

- A scrutiny function where performance information and reporting is directed at the ward level and the ward becomes a focal point for public challenge of officers, potentially enhancing local democracy, encouraging greater public awareness and engagement in local government.
- A range of council services could be delivered and organised around the ward, or groups of wards, and the ward could be the focus of community planning at the local level.

These possibilities highlight that the multi-member ward could play a significant role in re-energising local communities and acting as a focal point for community leadership. By decentralising power in these ways the multi-member ward may provide clear roles for elected members, which is particularly important due to the likelihood of increasing public expectations of salaried councillors.

The scenarios presented above for the role of the multi-member ward highlight that some form of area based decentralisation of power to the ward, area or locality may encourage effective multi-member ward working. It is up to councils to decide whether this is appropriate, and if so what form any decentralisation should take. However, the option of decentralisation raises the issue of how best to support this new structure, perhaps introducing ward, area or locality managers, serving members of a ward or groups of wards. It also raises issues of accountability for elected members, who may want to consider collaborating with their ward colleagues to explain what they have done as a team to serve the ward, perhaps through the production of joint annual reports and joint ward websites.

The research undertaken for this study identified the possibility that multi-member wards can increase the workload of elected members. This may arise from the greater level of electioneering encouraged by the system or from duplication of casework resulting from constituents going to each ward member in an attempt to get a quicker or better response. As mentioned above, by giving the ward a clear role in council decision-making the constant electioneering evident in some experiences of multi-member ward working can be reduced. It also appears that customer relationship management (CRM) software may have an important role to play in two key ways. Firstly, CRM software can ensure that council officials deal with routine enquiries, enabling the councillor to focus on difficult or controversial cases. Secondly, the software can allow councillors to see where an issue is already being dealt with by one of their ward colleagues.

Overall, therefore, the research highlights that there is a choice post May 2007. Councils can choose to do nothing to support and develop multi-member ward working, thereby risking a greater emphasis on political "competition", both within and between political parties. Alternatively, councils can decide to carve out clear decision-making and scrutiny roles for the ward, encouraging elected members to work together for their constituents. In an era of increasing public expectations of government in general, and the likelihood, specifically, of greater expectations of salaried elected members in Scotland, it may be a missed opportunity if councils fail to respond to the introduction of multi-member wards by decentralising power to the ward level, potentially re-energising local communities and enhancing local democracy.



Executive Summary

This research report explores what the introduction of multi-member wards might mean for the day-to-day work of councillors and officials in Scotland by examining how multi-member wards operate in Wales, England, Ireland and New Zealand. The research is based on a review of the relevant literature and face-to-face or telephone interviews with 45 interviewees from 10 councils across the four countries. Interviews were conducted between September and December 2006.

KEY FINDINGS

- Where political parties are a feature of local government, STV can create intra as well as inter-party competition at the ward level, which results in a significant increase in councillors' workload.
- Inter-party co-operation at ward level is possible, but this becomes difficult in tense political situations.
- Personal differences can be a major hindrance to the development of co-operative relationships in multi-member wards.
- Interaction between members seems to be easier in close-knit communities, where longer-standing relationships have often developed.
- Decentralised political management structures seem to facilitate increased co-operation within and between wards, by giving a clear purpose and role for the ward.
- Protocols do exist to govern officer-member interaction in a multi-member environment, however, informal common practice is more likely to shape relations.
- No evidence of formal procedures and protocols governing relationships between councillors in multi-member wards was uncovered.
- Workload can be split both geographically and by specialism within the same ward.
- Where strategies for caseload sharing between ward members exist they tend to have been developed on an informal and ad hoc basis, and in England, Ireland and Wales caseload sharing tends only to be done within political parties.
- Where councillors work closely together there is evidence to suggest that they reduce duplication of case work, which can also result in a reduction in workload.
- Evidence from New Zealand also highlights that multi-member working can benefit both members and constituents
- The ability to be flexible and to build and maintain good working relationships is important in multi-member wards.

Introduction

This report explores what the introduction of multi-member wards might mean for the day-to-day work of councillors and officials in Scotland. It does so by examining how multi-member wards operate in other countries, identifying how elected members and officials have supported multi-member ward working elsewhere and offering some suggestions that might make for an easier transition to multi-member ward working in Scotland.

Multi-Member Wards

Multi-member wards exist in a variety of political and electoral systems. In Scotland multi-member wards are being introduced as the result of a new electoral system, STV. STV is a form of Proportional Representation (PR) that can be defined as:

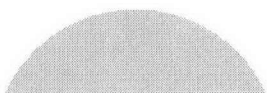
a preferential system in which the voter ranks the candidates in a multi-member district and the candidates that surpass a specified quota of first-preference votes are immediately elected. In successive counts, votes are redistributed from least successful candidates, who are eliminated, and votes surplus to the quota are redistributed from successful candidates, until sufficient candidates are declared elected

(International IDEA, 2005, p. 76)

STV is only used in a small number of countries for legislative elections; in the Republic of Ireland since 1921, in Malta since 1947, and was adopted for the 1990 election in Estonia (International IDEA Handbook, 2005, p. 71). STV is also used in the Australian Federal Senate and in several Australian states. In local government elections the use of STV is rare, though is used by some local authorities in New Zealand, has been adopted for local government elections in Northern Ireland since 1973 and has been used in the Republic of Ireland since the foundation of the state. The existence of STV, however, does not guarantee multi-member wards, nor does the existence of multi-member wards signify an STV electoral system. This report also explores multi-member ward working in first past the post (FPTP) electoral systems, by exploring the operation of multi-member wards in Wales and England.

Research methodology

Initial literature searches revealed that little research has been conducted on how multi-member wards operate in practice. Therefore, the research team at the Improvement Service attempted to plug this gap by conducting primary research on multi-member ward working in four different countries. This research is not meant to be a statistically representative study of multi-member ward working. Instead it aims to explore issues that arise out of multi-member ward working, examine some of the problems and benefits of multi-member wards, and examine what measures we can take in Scotland to support this new way of working.



As a result qualitative research was conducted on multi-member working in Wales, England, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand. A decision was taken to explore multi-member ward working in England and Wales because in many respects they operate within a similar political system to Scotland, so it was considered that some of the issues they face and mechanisms they adopt as a result of multi-member ward working may be useful for us to consider in Scotland. However, it was also considered important to explore multi-member ward working within an STV electoral system, so Ireland and New Zealand were also identified as case studies. These represent an interesting comparison, as multi-member ward working is relatively new in New Zealand but well established in Ireland.

The research was largely based on face-to-face and telephone interviews that were conducted between September and December 2006. While it is evident that there are a number of differences between local government in Scotland and each of these countries, it is our belief that lessons can still be learned from those who have experience of working in multi-member environments.

In total, 45 people were interviewed for this research, mainly elected members with experience of multi-member ward working and officials who worked closely with these members. Interviewees were based in a total of 10 Councils. Councils were targeted for this research based on political control and composition, geographical and democratic profiles. Particular wards were chosen to ensure relationships between members from various political parties, and independents, were examined.

Country	Number of Councils studied	Total Number of Interviewees	Interviewees		
			Councillors	Council officials	Others
England	3	16	11	4	1
Wales	3	21	10	7	4
Ireland	2	4	4	-	-
New Zealand	2	4	4	-	-
Total	10	45	29	11	5

Multi-Member Wards in Wales

KEY FINDINGS

- Inter-party co-operation at ward level is possible, but this becomes difficult in tense political situations.
- Personal differences can be a major hindrance to the development of co-operative relationships in multi-member wards.
- Interaction between members seems to be easier in close-knit communities, where longer-standing relationships have often developed.
- Officers are generally positive about multi-member working. They do not feel that these impact negatively on the work of councils.
- Protocols do exist to govern officer-member interaction in a multi-member environment, however, informal common practice is more likely to shape relations.

Introduction

This case study briefly outlines the local government system in Wales and provides background information about the local authority areas studied for this research before considering how multi-member wards are organised and managed in Wales. Issues considered include relationships between councillors in single and multi-party settings, methods of workload sharing, relationships with the electorate, and procedures and protocols used to assist ward management.

This chapter is largely based on information gleaned from interviews with 21 people, interviewees were:

- councillors and officials from three Welsh local authorities; Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Cardiff,
- representatives from the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association
- an academic from the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research at Cardiff University.

Local Government in Wales

Local councillors represent one of the five layers of government that exist in Wales. The Welsh electorate are also served by community or town councillors, Assembly Members from the National Assembly for Wales (AMs), Members of Parliament from the UK Parliament (MPs), and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

The present local government structure in Wales was established in 1996 as a result of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. This replaced the two-tier structure of counties and districts (which had existed since 1974) with new unitary authorities. There are now twenty-two unitary authorities: three cities, nine counties and ten county boroughs. These 22 authorities are served by 1264 councillors, who are elected every four years using the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system.

Generally speaking, in a FPTP electoral system, electors have one vote in an electoral area that is represented by one candidate. However, in Wales a large number of local government electoral districts are multi-member electoral areas. For instance, in the 1999 Welsh local government elections 675 councillors (53%) were elected from 275 multi-member divisions, which returned two, three, four or five members to their respective councils (Sunderland Commission, 2002, p. 13). In these districts, electors can have as many votes as there are seats to be filled. Thus, if there are three seats to be filled, electors can cast up to three votes for three different candidates and the three candidates with the most votes are elected. Under this system voters are not obliged to use all three of their votes and cannot allocate all their votes to one candidate. It is not a proportional electoral system because 'the percentage of votes won by a candidate in [a] ballot has no direct bearing on the allocation of...seats' (Sunderland Commission, 2002, p.15).

The Study Councils

Interviews were conducted in three Welsh councils; Cardiff, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly. The table below indicates that almost half of the wards in these councils had either three or four members. As three or four member wards will be introduced in Scotland in 2007, it is easy to see why a study of multi-member wards in Wales might be beneficial.

Fig 1: Electoral wards in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Cardiff

COUNCIL	WARD COMPOSITION				TOTAL NO. WARDS
	ONE MEMBER	TWO MEMBERS	THREE MEMBERS	FOUR MEMBERS	
Blaenau Gwent	0	7	8	1	16
Caerphilly	7	14	10	2	33
Cardiff	5	7	12	5	29
TOTAL NO. WARDS (%)	12 (15)	28 (36)	30 (39)	8 (10)	78 (100)

1. Cardiff Council

Cardiff, the biggest city in Wales and the country's capital, has a population of over 300,000 people. Unsurprisingly, Cardiff Council is also the largest in Wales. It operates under an Executive system that, at present, is controlled as a minority administration by the Liberal Democrat Party. The Liberal Democrats hold thirty-two of the council's seventy-five seats, Labour have twenty-seven, the Conservatives ten, Plaid Cymru four and Independents two. The seventy-five local councillors represent a total of twenty-nine electoral wards. The seven interviewees from Cardiff Council included five councillors, all of whom served in a multi-member ward, and two officials.

2. Blaenau Gwent Council

Blaenau Gwent is the smallest of the councils studied in Wales, with a population of 68,400. It is a relatively close-knit community in the heart of the Welsh Valleys which has experienced major socio-economic problems in recent years due to the demise of their largest industry, coal mining. Blaenau Gwent is served by forty-two councillors in sixteen wards, all of which have between two and four members. Thirty-one members are from the Labour Party, three are from the Liberal Democrat Party and eight are Independents. The council is therefore Labour controlled and operates under an executive system. The five interviewees from Blaenau Gwent Council consisted of three councillors, all of whom served in multi-member wards, and two officials.

3. Caerphilly County Borough Council

Caerphilly County Borough Council is situated in South Wales, close to Cardiff. The County Borough has a population of 171,000 and has seventy-three councillors. Caerphilly has thirty-three electoral wards and these wards are served by between one and four members. Caerphilly is also run by a Labour executive and the party split is as follows: Labour has thirty-nine members, Plaid Cymru has twenty-six and the remaining eight seats are held by Independents. The five interviewees from Caerphilly County Borough consisted of two councillors, all of whom served in multi-member wards, and three officials.

Opinions about Multi-Member Wards

Across Wales there seemed to be significant differences in councillor opinions of multi-member ward working. In Cardiff the councillors interviewed were the most negative about multi-member working, although this is not necessarily representative of councillors in Cardiff. Several interviewees in Cardiff were selected because it was known that they were facing difficult political situations in their wards and it was felt that interviewing them could provide particularly interesting lessons that might be transferable to the Scottish context. Additionally all Cardiff interviewees were serving in split wards (wards in which more than one party was represented). As such, each was working in an environment that was more likely to have problems associated with it and so we should be careful about drawing wider conclusions based on their experiences. In contrast, in both Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly the general impression amongst councillors was that multi-member wards worked reasonably well, both for the councillors concerned and for the electorate. This seemed to be particularly evident in Blaenau Gwent where the close-knit nature of the community meant that members tended to know each other fairly well outwith the context of the council.

Officers in all three councils did not view multi-member working as problematic. Indeed, Caerphilly's Chief Executive did not think they fundamentally affected the work of the council, or its broader strategies. While he did acknowledge that they could cause local conflicts, especially in relation to issues that had a strong political dimension, he stated that tensions in this regard were "few and far between".

Political Conflict

In Cardiff political difficulties were particularly evident in one two-member ward that was served by councillors from two of the larger parties on the Council. Both councillors in this ward were interviewed separately and it was clear that they found themselves in an unusually pressured situation. As one of them put it, the marginal nature of the ward meant that they were “constantly set up as sparring partners”. Consequently, neither felt that they could “sit back” in case one member gained some political advantage over the other. What is more, one of them also suggested that they sometimes adopted oppositional views just for the sake of it, as it was felt that political gains could only be made if they fought each other over even the smallest of issues.

Strangely, the difficult relationship that the two councillors in this ward had did not necessarily impact on the electorate in a negative way. Indeed, one of the councillors suggested that, because they were both working very hard to gain a political advantage over each other, the general public were benefiting from an improved service because both councillors were highly motivated to get things done! Notwithstanding this significant side benefit, both councillors would still have preferred to serve in a single member setting as they found their present working environment to be a particularly unhealthy one.

The example cited above can perhaps be viewed as a worst case scenario, however, other councillors also faced difficulties with multi-member ward working. One interviewee in Caerphilly stated that he did not feel that co-operation was possible in his ward because he did not trust one of the councillors from an opposing party that shared the ward with him. A Cardiff councillor claimed that she had no idea about what her fellow ward member did, other than steal her casework! She went on to say that she would prefer to work in a single member ward or, at the very least, with someone she could trust! Similarly, a councillor in Blaenau Gwent stated that there was “no co-operation whatsoever” in her ward because the two members from an opposing party she shared her ward with made no effort whatsoever to involve her in any ward work that they did.

Co-operative relationships

Notwithstanding the difficulties mentioned above, there were also examples of cooperation, even across political parties. In both Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent members from opposing parties, in most cases, did communicate with each other to some extent, although examples of extensive cross party cooperation were not to be found amongst the councillors interviewed at these councils.

In Cardiff, however, there was one three-member ward where a deeper level of inter-party cooperation was achieved. In this three-member ward the members managed to avoid conflict, even although the two parties involved were “always at each other’s throats” at council and national level. Indeed, a councillor interviewed from this ward suggested that a culture of mutual respect existed between the three of them and that they had made a real effort to work together for the good of

their ward. This was indicated by instances of cross-party caseload sharing between the members and that the members would give advice to, and seek advice from, each other. However, it must be pointed out that such cooperation still did not take place as a rule. Rather, the two members from the same party tended to be the ones that did most sharing of workload and ideas. Furthermore, when politicised issues emerged, particularly around election time, niceties were put to one side. As the councillor interviewed put it, "the gloves are off" at election time.

Despite the absence of inter-party co-operation the potential for members from the same party to work together in the ward still exists. This was the case for a Cardiff member who served in a three-member ward with a party colleague and a member from another party. While there was little co-operation or communication with the third ward member, the two colleagues did do a great deal of ward work together. For instance, they held joint surgeries and supported each other with their casework. The caseload sharing tended to be organised on a relatively informal basis and they would simply pass cases on to each other based on their areas of expertise. This arrangement seemed to work fairly well for them and the interviewee felt that they were able to provide a good service to the public notwithstanding their lack of contact with the third ward councillor. Further, while it was acknowledged that duplication took place due to their lack of contact with the other member, it would seem that officers were able to pick up on this so that the relevant departments took appropriate action and did not duplicate the work that they conducted. A lack of co-operation at ward level did not, therefore, have a major impact on service delivery by the various council departments. However, in Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly there were instances of members from the same party failing to communicate with their fellow ward members. As a result it is worth highlighting that whilst cooperation with a party member is more likely, shared party affiliations do not guarantee co-operation in Welsh multi-member wards.

Officer- Member Relations

In Wales formal protocols governing multi-member ward working were rare, with most councils working to 'common practice' rather than formally instituted procedures. In Blaenau Gwent relations between officials and members were particularly informal; the fact that the council had only forty-two members meant that the two secretaries who served them knew most if not all of them reasonably well. Nevertheless, unwritten protocols were still adhered to. For instance, Members Services would always provide the names of all the councillors in a ward if a member of the public asked for the contact details of their councillor. Similarly, all members in a given ward were supposed to be informed of any issue that related to their ward. However, there was the suggestion from one councillor that there was some favouritism in this regard (although this was qualified by the assertion that this was probably down to personalities rather than the politics of the officers concerned).

In Caerphilly there was one written protocol that dealt with the sharing of information between officers and members. This protocol had the following four conditions:

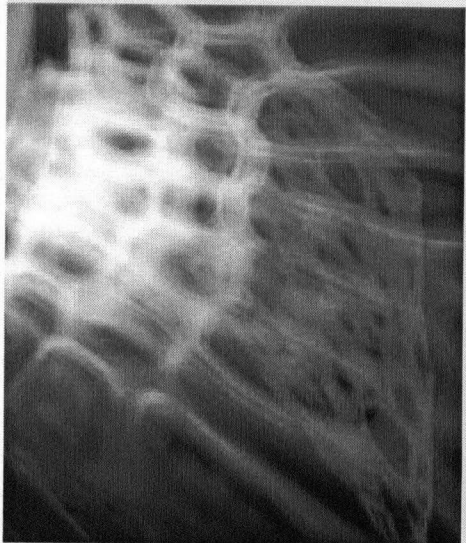
- i. When officers write to residents regarding matters of general concern in the area a copy should be forwarded to the local members e.g. traffic calming measures.
- ii. When officers write to residents regarding issues affecting one household the local member is not informed except as is mentioned in (iii) below.
- iii. Where a member of the Council has been involved in an issue affecting one household then the relevant officer(s) should keep the member informed of developments until the issue is finalised. In these circumstance officers do not copy the correspondence to the other ward members.
- iv. Where a member of the Council has been involved in an issue affecting more than one household then the relevant officer(s) should keep the member and all other local members informed of developments until the issue is finalised.

With this protocol in mind, a council official stated that Members Services were careful not to take sides on issues and attempted to be fair in information dissemination. However, as in Blaenau Gwent, there was suspicion that this wasn't always the case and concern was raised that independent councillors may be more likely to be ignored when it came to information sharing.

In Cardiff there are formalised procedures that relate to multi-member wards. For instance, council officials should keep all members in a ward informed of any matter that affects that ward. They should also only attend a meeting with a councillor or councillors if all members in the ward have been informed of the meeting (although, the members, having been informed, are then under no obligation to attend). In addition Members Services has a common practice of dealing with enquiries from the public: if a member of the public requests details of their ward councillors, Members Services provides a list in alphabetical order to ensure that there can be no accusation of bias on their part.

It would seem that both the informal procedures in the ward and the more formal protocols utilised by officers across wards have rather mixed outcomes in Cardiff. As in Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly there is a suspicion from some that impartiality from officers cannot be taken for granted and can impact multi-member ward working. However, some councillors also acknowledged that officers have a difficult job to do keeping all members from all parties satisfied and, as such, they do their best in what are often difficult circumstances. What is more, as with ward level relationships, it must be noted that personalities will always play a part in how members and officers interact with each other.¹

¹ It should also be noted that Cardiff Council has had well-publicised problems with regard to officer bias in the past. In 2003, the South Wales Echo newspaper uncovered a letter from a senior official to a Labour Party activist, encouraging him to write a letter to the same paper praising the Labour Lord Mayor. This perhaps leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of some councillors and, as a result, officers may face more of a struggle to gain the confidence of members regarding the jobs that they do (for more on the so-called 'Echogate Scandal,' see, for instance BBC News, 2004 and O'Connor, 2006).



RESEARCH BRIEFING

Perspectives on Multi-Member Ward Working

Andrew Morrison, Susan Reid
and Claire Lightowler

March 2007

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On 3 May 2007 the Scottish local government elections will, for the first time, be contested using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system. In Scotland, STV will result in the creation of large three or four member electoral wards across the country. These will replace the smaller, single-member wards that exist at present.

This research briefing highlights the key findings of research conducted into multi-member ward working by the Improvement Service. The research explores what the introduction of multi-member wards might mean for the day-to-day work of councillors and officials in Scotland by examining how multi-member wards operate in Wales, England, Ireland and New Zealand. The research is based on a review of the relevant literature and face-to-face or telephone interviews with 45 interviewees across the four countries, conducted between September and December 2006. Interviewees were based in a total of 10 councils. Councils were targeted for this research based on political control and composition, geographical and democratic profiles. Particular wards were chosen to ensure relationships between members from various political parties, and independents, were examined.

KEY FINDINGS

- Where political parties are a feature of local government, STV can create intra as well as inter-party competition at the ward level, which results in a significant increase in councillors' workload.
- Inter-party co-operation at ward level is possible, but this becomes difficult in tense political situations.
- Personal differences can be a major hindrance to the development of co-operative relationships in multi-member wards.
- Interaction between members seems to be easier in close-knit communities, where longer-standing relationships have often developed.
- Decentralised political management structures seem to facilitate increased co-operation within and between wards, by giving a clear purpose and role for the ward.
- Protocols do exist to govern officer-member interaction in a multi-member environment, however, informal common practice is more likely to shape relations.
- No evidence of formal procedures and protocols governing relationships between councillors in multi-member wards was uncovered.
- Workload can be split both geographically and by specialism within the same ward.
- Where strategies for caseload sharing between ward members exist they tend to have been developed on an informal and ad hoc basis, and in England, Ireland and Wales caseload sharing tends only to be done within political parties.
- Where councillors work closely together there is evidence to suggest that they reduce duplication of case work, which can also result in a reduction in workload.
- Evidence from New Zealand also highlights that multi-member working can benefit both members and constituents
- The ability to be flexible and to build and maintain good working relationships is important in multi-member wards.

Multi-Member Wards in Wales

In Wales there are twenty-two unitary authorities: three cities, nine counties and ten county boroughs. These 22 authorities are served by 1264 councillors, who are elected every four years using the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. In Wales a large number of local government electoral districts are multi-member electoral areas elected through the FPTP system. In these districts electors can have as many votes as there are seats to be filled.

To explore Welsh multi-member wards 17 Councillors and Officials were interviewed from three Welsh Councils; Cardiff, Blaneau Gwent and Caerphilly. In addition interviews were conducted with representatives from the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association and an academic from Cardiff University.

KEY FINDINGS FROM WALES

- Inter-party co-operation at ward level is possible, but this becomes difficult in tense political situations.
- Personal differences can be a major hindrance to the development of co-operative relationships in multi-member wards.
- Interaction between members seems to be easier in close-knit communities, where longer-standing relationships have often developed.
- Officers are generally positive about multi-member working. They do not feel that these impact negatively on the work of councils.
- Protocols do exist to govern officer-member interaction in a multi-member environment, however, informal common practice is more likely to shape relations.

Multi-Member Wards in England

A rather complicated system of local government has evolved in England over the years. At present, the country is split into nine different regions, although, of these, only London has any substantial amount of devolved power. Below these regions, there are significant variations in modes of governance, including Metropolitan counties and districts, Shire counties and districts, Unitary authorities and Greater London County and Borough. All local authority elections in England are held under the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. However, in England many electoral districts are multi-member electoral areas, where electors can have as many votes as there are seats to be filled. Therefore, multi-member ward working in England is organised through the First Past the Post electoral system.

Given the differences that exist between the Scottish and English systems of local government, it was decided that various branches of English local government should be studied for this project. Therefore, a non-metropolitan district (East Herts

District Council), a London Borough (Waltham Forest Borough Council) and a unitary authority (Bracknell Forest Borough Council) were selected for further research.

This paper is largely based on interviewees with 15 councillors and officials from three councils, East Herts District Council, Waltham Forest Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council. In addition an interview was conducted with a representative from the Local Government Association.

KEY FINDINGS FROM ENGLAND

- Co-operation between members from the same party seems to be common at ward level under First Past the Post (FPTP).
- Inter-party relationships tend to be characterised by little more than co-existence.
- The degree of co-operation that takes place at ward level is highly dependent on the political and personal differences that exist between members.
- Any strategies for caseload sharing between ward members seem to be developed on an informal and ad hoc basis.
- In general, both members and officers seem to be comfortable with the existence of multi-member wards, notwithstanding the potential for conflict that may exist.
- No evidence of procedures and protocols governing relationships between councillors in multi-member wards was found. However, examples of protocols used to cement relationships between officers and members in such environments were uncovered.

Multi-Member Wards in Ireland

There is a three-tier system of local government in Ireland. The top tier consists of eight regional authorities, which have a monitoring role regarding the use of EU funds and also co-ordinate some of the activities undertaken by sub-county authorities. Underneath these are the country's thirty-four local authorities, which are 'regarded as the primary units of local government in Ireland and the mainline providers of services'.¹

Members of the regional authorities are not directly elected but county, city, town and borough councillors are all elected by means of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system of Proportional Representation (PR).

This case study is based on information gleaned from a review of relevant literature, including previous studies of multi-member wards in Ireland, and primary data obtained from telephone interviews with four elected members from Dublin City Council and Kildare County Council conducted in October 2006.

KEY FINDINGS FROM IRELAND

- STV creates intra as well as inter-party competition at ward level. This seems to result in a significant increase in councillors' workload.
- The number of hung councils created under STV demands that some level of co-operation takes place between parties and this often translates to co-operation at ward level as well.
- Where councillors work closely together there is evidence to suggest that they reduce duplication. This could also result in a reduction in workload.
- Decentralised political management structures seem to facilitate increased co-operation within and between wards.
- There is no evidence of the use of protocols or procedures governing relationships within wards in Ireland. However, there is evidence of protocols governing how officers should deal with ward matters.

Multi-Member Wards in New Zealand

Local government in New Zealand is a two-tier system made up of regional councils and territorial authorities (either city or district councils), which sit geographically within one of the regional council areas. Four of the territorial authorities are unitary authorities combining the powers of a territorial authority with those of regional councils. Individual councils are free to determine their own governance structure. In practice, this means that most operate a committee system with meetings every 4-6 weeks which then reports to full council for a final vote.

Prior to the introduction of the Local Electoral Act in 2001, local elections in New Zealand were conducted under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. For election purposes, district and city councils were divided into wards with a mixture of single and multi-member wards being contested. The Local Electoral Act gave individual councils and their constituents the right to decide whether they would continue to use FPTP or whether they would move to a Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. Ten local authorities changed from FPTP to STV for the 2004 elections, retaining the structure of both single and multi-member wards.

New Zealand is similar to Scotland in that it has a mix of a few sizeable urban populations and large sparsely populated rural areas. This case study is based on a literature review and telephone interviews with three Councillors and one ex-Councillor from Marlborough District Council and Wellington City Councils, conducted in December 2006.

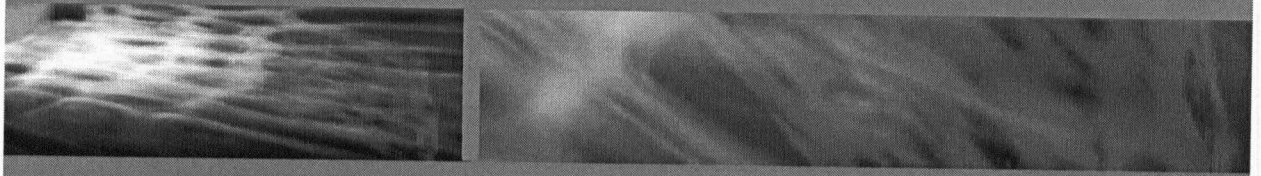
¹ Collins, N. and Quinlivan, A. (2006) 'Multi-level governance,' in Coakley, John and Gallagher, Michael eds. *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, Routledge (London), p.387

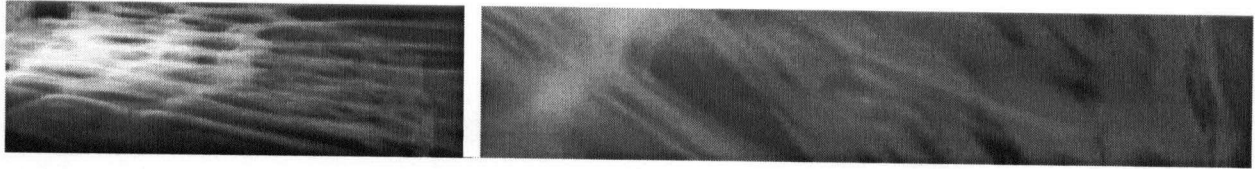
KEY FINDINGS FROM NEW ZEALAND

- Cooperation between ward councillors is the norm in New Zealand, probably because there is a lack of party politics at the local level.
- Cooperation can be beneficial to both constituents and elected members, and if it exists then multi-member wards can be better for the public and for councillors than single member wards.
- Cooperation may be easier in wards with less members.
- Constituents going to more than one councillor with a specific issue can be positive, it allows the constituent to hear different opinions.
- Workload can be split both geographically and by specialism within the same ward.
- There is no evidence of formal protocols or procedures governing multi-member ward working. In fact, opinion suggests that these could be unworkable and unhelpful.
- The ability to be flexible and to build and maintain good working relationships is important in multi-member wards.

FINAL WORD

It is hoped that this research will inform preparations for multi-member ward working in Scotland and will offer some guidance for elected members and officials for how to make a success of multi-member ward working. If you have any questions or comments about this research or multi-member ward working please don't hesitate to contact the Research Team at research@improvementservice.org.uk





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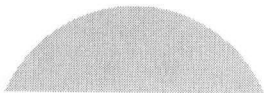
Westerton House, Westerton Road
East Mains Industrial Estate
Broxburn EH52 5AU

T. 01506 775558

F. 01506 775566

E. info@improvementservice.org.uk
www.improvementservice.org.uk

Improvement Service is devoted to improving the efficiency, quality and accountability of public services in Scotland through learning and sharing information and experiences.



Multi Member Wards – Protocols

The City of Edinburgh Council

20 December 2007

Purpose of report

- 1 To submit for approval draft protocols to regulate issues arising from multi-member wards.

Main report

- 2 In its report on remuneration arrangements for councillors, the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee noted that there could be a big increase in councillors' workload when they are one of three or four representing a multi-member ward. It recommended that councillors should respond to this challenge, work closely with other councillors for their ward and develop new ways of working which minimise duplication and less productive effort. Reference is made to the development of protocols to regulate working in multi-member wards. Revised Guidance from the Standards Commission for Scotland also suggests this in the interest of avoiding tensions.
- 3 The Improvement Service commissioned research into multi-member ward working in Wales, England, Ireland and New Zealand. This research found no evidence of formal procedures or protocols governing relationships between councillors in multi-member wards nor of any perceived need for them. There are no models from which Scotland can draw. There are, however, examples of protocols governing officer/member interaction, largely in the interests of equality of treatment and impartiality.
- 4 Draft protocols regarding the provision of information and advice to, and about, councillors by officers are set out in Appendix 1. While the principal purpose is to reinforce equality of treatment, an exception is made for individual casework where confidentiality is required to protect personal data.
- 5 In May 2000, the Council approved a Member/Officer Relations Protocol. A copy remains on the Council's intranet and the attention of councillors is drawn to it after each election, as part of the induction materials provided. While the Protocol still provides a useful point of reference for the occasional difficulty which arises, it is now rather out of date, as a result of developments with the Councillors' Code of Conduct and the Standards Commission's guidance on it

and the changes to the Council's political management arrangements. It is therefore proposed to review the Protocol and incorporate the content of Appendix 1 within it.

- 6 The introduction of multi-member wards has also raised issues regarding the use of Council facilities by councillors for communication with their constituents. Constituents now have a choice of councillor and a factor in making that choice may be the councillor's political party affiliation. For this reason, members have been advised that they may identify their political party in signing off their casework correspondence. On the other hand, continuation of practices prior to the May elections with regard to the distribution of newsletters and mail shots carry a strong possibility of duplication of effort, with residents receiving up to four communications from different councillors in similar terms. In the interest of efficient use of resources, there needs to be a presumption in favour of co-operation, in collaboration with the developing Neighbourhood Management service.
- 7 Other Councils have prepared guidelines to supplement the provisions in the Councillors' Code of Conduct regarding the use of Council facilities, which reflect their local circumstances. Arising from the determination of a complaint against a member of a Council where such guidelines exist, the Standards Commission for Scotland recommended that that Council formally adopt and publish its guidelines and add the requirement that the use of facilities should represent the efficient and economic use of the Council's resources. Draft guidance for the City of Edinburgh Council is attached at Appendix 2.
- 8 The text of Appendices 1 and 2 has been developed in consultation with members of the Cross Party Working Group.

Recommendations

- 9 To approve:
 - the supplementary guidance on information sharing in multi-member wards at Appendix 1 to this report.
 - the guidance on the use of Council facilities by councillors at Appendix 2 to this report.
- 10 To review the guidance after one year.


Jim Inch
Director of Corporate Services

07/12/07

Appendices	Appendix 1 – Member/Officer Relations Protocol – Supplementary Guidance Appendix 2 – Guidance on the use of Council Facilities by Councillors.
Contact/tel	John Sturt, Council Secretary ☎ 529 4136 john.sturt@edinburgh.gov.uk
Wards affected	All
Background Papers	None.

jws74

MEMBER/OFFICER RELATIONS PROTOCOL

SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE

INFORMATION SHARING IN MULTI-MEMBER WARDS

Introduction

- 1 As a result of the introduction of multi-member wards for the May 2007 Council elections, there are now three or four councillors for each ward from different political parties. This raises new issues for the provision of information and advice by officers to, or about, the members in each ward.
- 2 The protocols below are intended to help manage relations in this area, as a supplement to the Member/Officer Relations Protocol pending a full review.

Provision of Information

- 3 All members have equal status as representatives of a multi-member ward. They have a duty to be accessible to all the people of the area they have been elected to serve and to respect their interests. It is essential that officers have regard to this equality of status when providing information and advice to members.
- 4 With a view to maintaining equality of treatment therefore:
 - public requesting names of ward councillors should be provided with full details of all councillors for the ward unless they ask only about a specific councillor. They should also be told their political party affiliation if requested;
 - officers should keep all members of a ward equally informed on matters affecting the ward. In particular, whenever any form of consultative exercise on a local issue is being undertaken, each councillor should be notified of it;
 - officers should consult all members of a ward when exercising functions under the Scheme of Delegation to Officers;
 - all ward members should be invited to photo calls/launches of projects etc in the ward;
 - all ward members should be invited to public meetings and site visits, including where the meetings or visits have been arranged at the request of one of them. However, it is a matter for each member whether they choose to attend.

Councillors' casework

5 When constituents approach a councillor for assistance with a personal problem, they provide personal data about themselves. Depending on the circumstances, the councillor has to make a judgement whether the constituent can be deemed to have consented for their personal data to be shared. In seeking advice from Council officials, it is necessary to provide sufficient details for a meaningful response. However, without the consent of the constituent, there should be a presumption against:

- a councillor sharing personal data with other ward councillors;
- an officer who receives personal data from a councillor sharing it with other ward councillors.

Officers must therefore ensure the confidentiality of the responses they provide to councillors on individual casework. But it is also essential to ensure that consistent advice is provided. Constituents may approach more than one councillor for their ward. Procedures need to be in place to ensure that each councillor receives the same response.

Guidance for Officers Working in Multi Member Wards

1. Introduction

The purpose of this note is to provide clear guidance for Council Officers in how they should consistently approach their work in supporting Multi Member Wards.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the guidance contained in the Member Officer Protocol adopted by the Council in December 2005 and amended in October 2007.

2. Context

Development of the guidance has been based on the following three key principles:

- The seven principles of public life – leadership, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and honesty.

Openness: You should be as open as possible in all decisions and actions you take. You should give reasons for your decisions and should not restrict information unless this is clearly required by Council policy or by the law. (Code of conduct for local government employees in Dumfries and Galloway).

- All members have equal status as representatives of a multi member ward – (Guidance on protocol for relationships between Ward Members). This applies unless Members of a ward make arrangements on how 'work' is to be shared between them or a Member(s) is formally absent from their role as a Councillor.
- Reducing the potential duplication inherent in Multi Member Ward working (Checklist produced by COSLA, Solace and Solar).

3. Guidelines

3.1 Confidentiality

In some instances a constituent, body/group or a Member(s) acting on their behalf will request that a matter raised is confidential and only a nominated Member(s) is to be informed. This request for confidentiality will in normal circumstances be adhered to and overrides the following guidance.

3.2 General Information

When any Member requests advice and a response in writing/ by email this should be copied to all relevant ward members. It is appropriate to acknowledge any previous input from a specific Member(s). It is acknowledged that a high proportion of enquiries will be of a sensitive nature, ie antisocial behaviour, homelessness, housing. This still remains as normal business for a Member and unless a constituent requests confidentiality, the provisions of this guidance will apply.

3.3 Meetings arranged by Officers

If a meeting dealing with a ward issue is being arranged, all relevant ward Members should be invited to attend. If a specific Member(s) has been involved in arranging the meeting it is appropriate to acknowledge their input. Every effort should be made to ensure that the meeting time and venue is arranged so that all parties can attend.

3.4 Meetings arranged by Members

If a meeting is being arranged by a Member(s) on a ward issue, they can decide not to invite other ward Members and Officers should attend these meetings. If an Officer attends the meeting and a Member who was not present requests information about what was discussed, the Officer should provide this information.

3.5 Meetings arranged by others

3.5.1 When a meeting dealing with a ward issue is being arranged by an external body/group or person they should be advised about the Council's guidance for Officers arranging meetings (Item 3.3). They should be encouraged to follow this guidance.

3.5.2 When a meeting is arranged and all the relevant ward Members are not invited you should request an explanation before you agree to attend. If Officers attend such a meeting where there is no adequate reason for the differing treatment of Members or it is 'political' (ie only Members from specific party/parties are invited to attend), an equitable parity for the ward Members is not being provided. In such instances Officers should not attend the meeting, unless there is an over-riding justification to attend, and they should communicate this to all relevant Members in advance.

3.6 Media and Events

3.6.1 If you are arranging an event or a media opportunity which is specific to an area all relevant ward Members must be invited.

3.6.2 If you are looking for a spokesperson/someone to open an event, the procedure is:

- If it is a local issue, ask the Area Chair or Vice Chair
- If it is a regional service issue being highlighted in a specific area, ask Chair or Vice Chair of the relevant Service Committee
- If it is a corporate issue ask the Convener or Leader
- If the event includes the participation of a Scottish Government Minister, all political group leaders must be invited along with the local Members.
- If an event is organised by the Scottish Government, but takes place in Council premises, all political group leaders must be invited and local Members notified
- Arrangements for Ministerial visits, events organised by the Scottish Government should be progressed in accordance with existing Council protocols and the Office of the Chief Executive advised.

3.6.3 If a local event is dependent on the attendance of non-Council people, the availability of local Members should be taken into account, but might not be the deciding factor if the Convener, Leader or Committee Chair is available.

3.6.4 If a Member has a strong association with a project or initiative you should endeavour to give them a role in the event having regard to the foregoing advice.

3.7 General

Most communication to Members should be through email. The communication should be sent to all relevant Members in the same email (so it is clear who has also received the information) and thereby all Members have access to the information at the same time. Arrangements for meetings (time, date, and venue) should be made to suit the majority of, if not all, Members.

4. **Advice and Support**

Any queries on this guidance and its application should be directed to the Service Manager Committee and Member Services

Alex Haswell
Director Chief Executive Service

January 2008

Multi-Member Wards - Good Practice Guidelines

Key Principles

- All elected members within each multi-member ward have a duty to be accessible to their constituents and to represent their interests conscientiously.
- All elected members have equal formal and legal status.
- No elected member should identify his/herself as the sole representative for a ward.
- In general an elected member should not deal with a matter relating to a constituent or constituency issue outwith his/her own ward, although there may be circumstances when this is relevant, for example, an area wide or policy issue.

Good Practice Guidelines

Dealing with Individual Constituents' Cases

- An individual constituent has the right to approach any of the elected members representing his/her ward. A constituent may approach a particular elected member on the basis of location, political party or some other basis - the choice is entirely up to the individual constituent.
- Elected Members dealing with constituents may be given personal information and must ensure that such information is handled sensitively and securely. Further advice on this is contained in the Good Practice Note – Advice for the elected and prospective members of local authorities issued by the Information Commissioner's Office (www.ico.gov.uk).
- In the event of a member receiving inappropriate, persistent, unreasonable or vexatious enquiries from a constituent by whatever means, the member may decide to restrict further contact to written communication or terminate contact. Further advice on individual cases can be obtained, if required, from senior personnel within the Chief Executive's Department.
- Elected members must not notify other members representing the ward of enquiries which they receive from constituents, or copy constituents' correspondence to them, without the consent of the constituent concerned, as that would breach the confidential nature of the relationship between constituent and elected member. Elected Members should be sure that they have a constituent's consent to the use or transfer of his/her personal information in dealing with a case. It may be that for a particular case or circumstance a member wishes to ensure that he/she has written consent.
- All elected members within a particular ward may agree amongst themselves to allocate responsibilities on the basis of subject matter. That would always be subject to the right of an individual constituent to expect a councillor of their choice within their ward to progress a particular enquiry.

- An elected member may suggest to a constituent referring a specific enquiry to another elected member. Such a referral should only be made with the consent of the constituent who may request that the enquiry be dealt with by the member of their choice.
- Members may be approached by a constituent in relation to dealings with another statutory body such as the health board or Scottish Water. Each of these other statutory bodies are likely to have their own arrangements for progressing enquiries and dealing with complaints. Details of the relevant contact points will be provided to each member.

Dealing with Ward Issues

- Any councillor is entitled to take an interest in or take up a matter affecting the ward for which they were elected. Councillors are likely to have a greater impact where they work collectively for a common cause, as their constituents would expect them to. That may not be possible in some instances because of perfectly legitimate political differences but councillors may wish to contact one another, as a matter of courtesy, where they are involved or planning to become involved in a major local issue. Any exchange of information must comply with the data protection legislation and, in particular, members should ensure that any constituent's personal details are not normally shared, in order to safeguard the constituent's right to privacy.
- When an officer writes to residents regarding matters of general concern in an area, all ward councillors will be sent copies of the correspondence, eg traffic calming measures, bin collection cycles, etc. When a councillor has been involved in a private matter affecting one household then the relevant officer should keep the councillor informed of significant developments until the matter is concluded.
- Where an officer is calling a meeting with ward councillors to discuss a ward issue which is of a non-personal nature, the officer will invite all ward members to allow them to be briefed on the issue.

Dealing with Employees

- The Protocol for relations between councillors and employees in Scottish Councils which forms part of the Councillors' Code of Conduct applies as does the Council's own members/officers' protocol.
- In particular it should be noted correspondence between councillor and an officer should not normally be copied by the officer to any member of the Council, unless specifically authorised by the councillor or authorised by implication by the original correspondence being copied to the member or otherwise. This should be made clear in the correspondence to the councillor. In the copying of any correspondence the officer concerned must have particular regard to the issue of confidentiality and ensure that the confidentiality of the councillor or any other party is preserved.

Dealing with Local Organisations

- Boundaries of local organisations, including community councils, are unlikely to be coterminous with multi-member ward boundaries. Some organisations will straddle two or more of the new multi-member wards and this is certainly the case with community councils. It is therefore likely that councillors will receive cross boundary

enquiries. These enquiries may require to be dealt with in conjunction with councillor(s) from another ward(s). However, as with enquiries from individual constituents, information concerning cross-boundary enquiries should only be shared if the express approval is given by the organisation concerned (unless the information is of a general nature), who may request that the enquiry be dealt with only by the member(s) of their choice.

Telephone Enquiries

- Members of the public calling the council to find out who their local member is will normally telephone the contact centre or the members services section. Staff receiving a call will advise enquirers of the names of all the members for a particular ward and will offer to provide contact details for all or, if requested, a specific member. Members' details will be provided in alphabetical order by surname.
- Members of the public calling for a particular councillor will be put through only to the councillor concerned. If the councillor is unavailable the person calling will be given the option of leaving a message. Only if the caller asks will the call be transferred to another councillor.

Describing Elected Members

- Councillors within each multi-member ward are all of equal status and each represents the whole of their ward. Councillors must not describe themselves as representing (or having a particular interest in) only part of the ward for which they were elected.
- Councillors should not claim to be the sole member for their ward.
- Councillors will be provided with standard Council stationery based on a template approved by the Head of Executive Office including letter headed paper, compliment slips and business cards. Separate stationery will be provided for use by the Provost as the Council's civic head.
- Councillors' details and also contact details will be provided through a number of sources including the Council's website, Council diary and the list of elected members.

5th October, 2010.
Agenda Item No. 7

Review of Protocols

Report by: Michael Enston, Executive Director (Performance & Organisational Support)

Wards Affected:

Purpose

To consider the response to the review of protocols agreed by the Standards and Audit Committee on 3rd March, 2010.

Recommendation(s)

That the Group:-

- consider the comments made by officers, members and political groups on the protocols; and
- approve the Councillor/Officer protocol in the appendix to this report, which incorporates the Protocols into a single document.

Resource Implications

There are no significant resource implications.

Legal & Risk Implications

The Council need to ensure that the protocols to guide members and officers in relationships with one another are robust to ensure accountability between officers and members, compliance with the legal responsibilities on the Council and the principles of good governance. If these are not accurate, these may lead to challenge or reputational damage.

Policy & Impact Assessment

Having regard to the review and the comments on the protocols, there is no significant impact on the governance and procedural arrangements between officers and members currently operated by the Council.

Consultation

Officers, members and political groups.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At their meeting on 3rd March, 2010, the Standards and Audit Committee agreed to review and, if appropriate, combine into one document the following protocols:-
- Member/Officer Protocol for Multi-Member Wards
 - Guidance on Ministerial, Other Governmental and VIP Visits
 - Inter-Party Protocol
 - Fife Supplemental Protocol for Relations between Members and Officers in Scottish Local Government
- 1.2 Comments have been received from officers, four members and two political groups and these are outlined in this report.

2.0 Comments Received

2.1 Inter-Party Protocol

This Protocol sets out the rights and responsibilities of Councillors and of political groups in the course of conducting Council business. The comments received are as follows:-

- consider change of name and update terminology to reflect current structures within the Council;
- no need for senior Councillors to advise local members of visits to wards;
- give political groups the right to proportional membership of Working Groups involving elected members, subject to a minimum membership of one elected member per group;
- delete reference to restrictions on political groups discussing matters before an Area Committee and individual Councillors voting on party lines at Area Committees; and
- clarify Councillors' rights of access to information.

2.2 Fife Supplement to Protocol for Relations between Members and Officers in Scottish Local Government

This Supplement covers the relationship between members and officers in relation to the issue of reports and agendas and engaging with political groups. The comments received are as follows:-

- delete reference to Area Services Committees under "excluded issues for decision making by political groups";
- consider removal of last paragraph which relates to discussions on major planning applications; and
- clarify/

- clarify within the Protocol the process for reports and agendas, the involvement of the Chairs and the agenda planning process.

2.3 **Ministerial, Other Governmental and VIP Visits**

This Guidance promotes good practice in relation to visits by government ministers, MPs, MSPs and MEPs and the other VIPs in connection with Council work and/or in connection with a Council facility.

- At paragraph 3.1, inviting a local political, ensure that wards members are notified of any visit by an elected politician or VIP is taking place including visits for specific purposes such as prize givings.
- Not necessary to notify local members of unofficial visits by senior Councillors visiting their ward.
- Titles to be used, not individual names.

2.4 **Member and Officer Protocol for Multi-Member Wards**

- Clarify position regarding data protection and issues raised by Councillors on behalf of individual constituents.
- Reduction in timescale for officers responding to Councillors
- Emphasise the need to have a good working relationship amongst members and their responsibility to try to work together to avoid duplication and expense.
- Remind officers of the terms of the protocol, ensure good communication with all parties involved in any particular issue and remind voluntary organisations that all Councillors in a multi-member ward have equal status on an annual basis and advise members of the Link Officers working with voluntary and community organisations.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Members are invited to consider these comments and to approve the Councillor/Officer protocol appended to this report.

List of Appendices

Councillor/Officer Protocol

Background Papers

None

Report Contact

Iain Grant, Senior Manager (Standards and Governance),
Performance and Organisational Support
Fife House, North Street, Glenrothes
Telephone: 08451 555555 (Ext. 442227)
email – iain.grant@fife.gov.uk