

**Report of Assistant Chief Executive Customer Access and Performance**

**Report to Executive Board**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> May 2013**

**Subject: Implementation of an Area Lead Member Role**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. A review of area working was completed in December 2012 with a number of recommendations agreed by Executive Board. One of the recommendations was to develop and strengthen the existing local "champion role" and re-launch this as an Area Lead Member role. The main aim being to clarify the role itself, strengthen links to Executive Members and council services, improve training and support and encourage both formal and informal links to relevant partners. This paper sets out the Area Lead Member role in more detail and recommends that Area Committees appoint to these roles in the new municipal year.

**Recommendations**

2. Members of Executive Board are recommended to agree to proposals contained within this report for Area Committees to appoint Area Lead Members for the 2013/14 municipal year in accordance with a number of defined roles to be considered at the Annual General Meeting of Full Council on 20 May 2013.

## **Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 A review of area working was completed in December 2012 with a number of recommendations agreed by Executive Board. One of the recommendations was to develop and strengthen the existing local “champion role” and re-launch this as an Area Lead Member role. The main aims being to clarify the role itself, strengthen links to Executive Members and council services, improve training and support and encourage both formal and informal links to relevant partners. This paper sets out the Area Lead Member role in more detail and recommends that Area Committees appoint to these roles in the new municipal year.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 One of the recommendations of the review of area working was to develop and strengthen the existing member “champion role” and re-launch this enhanced role as an “Area Lead Member”. This paper further defines the role itself, identifies the training and support required and the linkages to both Executive Members and key officers. The effectiveness of this approach will be monitored through Area Chairs and Area Leaders with updates provided within the Area Working Annual Report to Executive Board (first report due Autumn 2013).
- 2.2 Overall this role is seen as important in providing a local “Lead Member” perspective on various issues and has great potential to do more in driving democratic accountability by providing Area Committee based leadership on key issues. The Area Lead Member role would also work closely with Executive Members and Directors to better align city wide and local policy making, share best practice, provide support and challenge and help embed the locality working design principles.
- 2.3 It also links to the Commission for Local Government which identified the critical importance of local democratic leadership in driving the way in which local government responds to a changing and ever more challenging environment. Within the current financial context where budgets are shrinking and difficult decisions need to be made in terms of service delivery the importance of ensuring a strong local perspective and driving more local decision making is seen as an essential ingredient to making the right decisions.

## **3 Main issues**

### **Defining the Area Lead Member Role**

- 3.1 The Area Lead Member role is defined as follows:
  - Working closely with Area Committee chairs to identify and lead relevant debates at Area Committees supported by relevant officers as required.
  - Representing the Area Committee at local project or partnership meetings, and in the commissioning process to ensure the needs and interests of the area are represented. As required, issues will need to be brought back to the Area Committee for further consultation/discussion and for formal decision making.

- Developing informal opportunities and networks with council services and key partners to build understanding, drive closer partnership working, provide challenge and bring a local democratic perspective to a wider range of service delivery.
- Working with the relevant Executive Member and officer lead(s) to ensure a locality dimension to policy development; championing and supporting the agenda locally; disseminating and building local understanding of the overall policy/strategy; highlighting any service issues/failures; facilitating local problem solving and service improvement; sharing best practice; and capturing and learning from innovative approaches developed through Area Committees. With a focus on ensuring effective 2 way communication links between the Executive and Area Committees.
- Working with officers to ensure progress is monitored through regular performance updates especially for functions delegated to Area Committees.
- Using local forums and local community engagement mechanisms to develop a good understanding of the local needs and feeding these into policy development and service improvement processes.

3.2 The All Party Working Group that oversaw the Area Working Review felt it important that a core set of Area Lead Member roles were nominated by every Area Committee. The group felt these should cover on the key delegated functions as this is where the role can have the greatest impact locally. But it was agreed that there were also some other important areas where a local lead was needed like health and wellbeing. Over and above this core set other roles could be nominated by Area Committees to reflect key local issues. It is also envisaged that Area Committees would have some flexibility to further join up or split roles to suit local needs as long as all the core roles are covered. Consideration could also be given to the appointment of time limited “Area Lead Members” in response to a specific issue eg, implementation of new legislation with a significant local impact such as welfare reform.

3.3 Following the recent consultation with Area Committees concerns were raised about the number of roles proposed and members time capacity to fulfil these. Therefore, it is proposed that for the new municipal year the list of core Area Lead Members is more limited with a focus on getting these right with consideration given to extending this list in future years.

3.4 It is proposed that the above Area Lead Member roles be included within the council’s constitution and be formally reviewed on an annual basis as part of the AGM process. Therefore, it is proposed that the list of Area Lead Members roles for 2013/14 be agreed and formalised at the Annual General Meeting of Full Council on 20 May 2013. It is envisaged that for the first year four to six roles will be proposed.

### **Training and Support**

3.5 Support, training and liaison arrangements will be important in making this work. Clearly these will need to be tailored to the particular Area Lead Member roles

and will be set out in more detail for each role. Training will be accessed through existing member development arrangements and through liaison with area support teams. Training will include the following key elements:

- Core Skills Training – provided through Member Development to ensure Area Lead Members have the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake this role effectively.
- Area Lead Member Induction Training – facilitated by the Area Support Teams with relevant service staff and partners as appropriate. The aim to provide a broad understanding of the service provision in place, link members to the key partners, local partnerships and networks relevant to their area of responsibility. For experienced members or existing champions this might not be needed or would be more tailored.
- On-going Development/Support and Advice - briefings and informal meetings and updates to support Area Lead Members in fulfilling their role. This would also aim to build on-going links with service staff in the local area including more informal opportunities as appropriate eg meet the team and work shadowing. This would include briefings/updates with the relevant Executive Member and officer leads on key policy issues. Again this support would be tailored to individual members skills and experience.
- Peer mentoring/support – this is already available through the political groups and will be extended to include the Area Lead Member role as required. Members would access this through existing 1-2-1 and personal development plan arrangements.

### **Other relevant issues**

- 3.6 Some Area Committees have previously reported difficulties in appointing to the current champion roles. However, we are also aware that some backbench members have raised concerns about a lack of influence. Overall the Area Lead Member role provides an opportunity for backbench members to have more influence which should encourage more individuals to take on the roles. It also provides an opportunity to share the workload and enable members to build on their areas of expertise and interest.
- 3.7 The Area Lead Member role will require members to take on a wider role across the geography of the Area Committee not just their ward; and for other Area Committee Members to endorse/support the area lead in representing the Area Committees views. In the consultation some members expressed concerns that they may not be as knowledgeable about surrounding wards as they are about their own. As well as pointing out that their primary allegiance will be to their own ward rather than the area. However, broadly members were supportive of adopting this approach and key to the success of the role will be the link back to the Area Committee (or through a sub-group) to ensure key issues are debated, views gathered and formal decisions made by the Area Committee as required. The Area Lead Members will also need to work closely with the Area Committee Chairs in scheduling debates and to ensure appropriate time is set aside on agendas.

- 3.8 For the two ward Area Committee – Inner West – it was considered whether co-optees to the Area Committee who are not elected members could fulfil an “Area Lead Representative” role. This is an issue that received broad support during the consultation with Area Committees particularly in relation to the concern raised in terms of time capacity to take on Area Lead Member roles. It is proposed that this option is open to all Area Committees to agree locally with a review undertaken as part of the annual report on area working.
- 3.9 A key success factor for the Area Lead Member role is that people understand their role and actively consult, engage and liaise with them on key relevant issues. To be effective this will require the relevant Executive Member and to meet regularly with Area Lead Members ideally with key officers. It will require relevant services and partners to provide opportunities for liaison/engagement as well as training and support.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 The development of the Area Lead Member role falls directly out of the recent review of area working which was subject to significant consultation with a range of stakeholders including members and officers. A series of drop in sessions were held for elected members over the summer of 2012 and their views were influential in shaping the recommendations including the change proposed in this paper. An all party working group also further debated and shaped the review findings. Officer consultation was initiated through discussions with each directorate leadership team but were followed up with further specific discussions as required. The area support teams were a particularly important stakeholder as they are directly involved in the work of Area Committees and their views were gathered through team meetings and individual discussions.
- 4.1.2 These specific proposals have also been consulted on further through Area Committee meetings during March and April and key points made were:
- Broadly all Area Committees welcomed the proposals albeit with some concerns, in particular, many welcomed a clearer role/purpose as compared to the existing champion role. Many also wanted the opportunity to shape the role rather than having it tied down in a detailed role description. Many felt it was important that this was “followed through” and made to work in practice.
  - The issue that received the most support was the proposal for a clear link between Area Lead Member and the relevant Portfolio holders but some were concerned about an overlap with the role of scrutiny. However, the focus of the role needs to be on supporting and championing the agenda locally, highlighting local issues/barriers and practical problem solving to better meet local needs.
  - Training and support was universally agreed as crucial to success including induction and support in developing links with partners and identifying best ways to influence partners.

- Concerns were raised about the capacity of members to fulfil this role with worries about it involving lots more meetings and the potential impact on members ward role. This is an issue that need to be further considered in developing the role with members locally and kept under review during implementation. It is proposed that Area Leaders and their teams will work with services/partners to broker practical solutions that meet members needs and ways of working. In addition, it is proposed to adopt a limited number of these roles initially to ensure these are done well prior to rolling this approach out to other areas.
- Some concerns were expressed about it blurring the role of officers and members which may undermine members independence and therefore position to challenge. However, being better informed may also enable constructive challenge. Again this issue will need to be considered during implementation.
- Some specific comments were made in terms of the functional areas proposed and this feedback has been used to shape the list of Area Lead Roles for 2013/14 that will go to the AGM on 20<sup>th</sup> May.

4.1.3 Public consultation was not considered necessary for this decision as it relates to internal arrangements to the council.

## **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 Equality is clearly represented within a number of the formally stated roles of an Area Committee. These include: to act as a focal point for community involvement, help members listen to and represent their communities and help members understand the specific needs of the community in their area. The development of the Area Lead Member role aims to support members in undertaking this role of championing local needs by providing clear links to both the relevant Executive Member, council service staff and to partners agencies. In addition it provides the mechanism for, and encourages, the negotiation and development of local solutions that suit local circumstances which will in turn address any issues of inequality.

## **4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 These arrangements aim specifically to support in the delivery of improved outcomes in line with the City Priority and Council Business Plans with many of the proposed roles lining directly to key priorities. The aim being to ensure that local needs are represented better in policy/strategy setting, decision making, service design and delivery and partnership working through this key role. The development of the Area Lead Member role provides an opportunity for members to develop their community leadership role as set out within the Commission for Local Government.

## **4.4 Resources and value for money**

4.4.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this proposal.

## **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 There are no specific legal implications, the report is available to the public and is subject to call in.

## **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 The proposal in this report implements a recommendation made by Executive Board and as such there are no direct risks arising from the proposals. Improving the governance and accountability of local partnerships through challenge and support from area leads is seen as important in delivering improved outcomes and tailoring services to local needs. There are also clear links to a number of the budget and financial risks and the development and strengthening of our locality working arrangements and local decision making will help to minimise key financial risks going forward.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 This report sets out more detail on the Area Lead Member role following the review of area working in 2012. The role is seen as crucial in providing a local “lead” perspective on various issues and in driving democratic accountability by providing Area Committee based leadership on key issues.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.2 Members of Executive Board are recommended to agree to proposals contained within this report for Area Committees to appoint Area Lead Members for the 2013/14 municipal year in accordance with a number of defined roles to be agreed at the Annual General Meeting of Full Council on 20 May 2013.

## **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.