

Implementation Executive

4 April 2008

Support Facilities for Members on the New Council - Update



Joint Report of Lesley Davies, Acting Director of Corporate Services and Alan Hodgson, Director of Customer Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update on plans to provide additional support facilities for Members of the New Council.

Background

- 2 On 20 March 2008, the County Council's Cabinet approved proposals to provide the following additional support facilities at County Hall:
 - Political Party or Group Office accommodation;
 - general workspace for Members as a whole (second Resource Centre);
 - car parking;
 - direct support staff; and
 - ICT

Accommodation

- 3 Service Direct (the County Council's Director Labour Organisation) will be on-site from 29 March to begin the Bar Area and Members' Lounge conversions to Group Office and general workspace accommodation respectively. All electrical, mechanical, ICT and furniture requirements are being firmed up. The Group Offices have a completion date target of 23 May and in the meantime Groups can make use of other meeting rooms. The second Resource Centre is due for completion by 1 May.

Car Parking

- 4 A date is being agreed with Service Direct to carry out the alterations to the car park to provide a further 20 reserved spaces by 1 May.
- 5 An appropriate communication about all this work is to be issued to everyone concerned.

Direct Support Staff

- 6 Additional staff will be deployed from a rationalisation exercise presently being concluded to help provide all Members with the basic support they need to fulfil their responsibilities. During April these staff will be briefed/trained on their new role and accommodation for them will be located in the Members' Suite.

ICT

- 7 To best support all Members to carry out their various roles in future, Cabinet approved the provision of an **Essential Toolkit**, together with access to other Council services through new technology, enhanced website engagement services and additional technical support staff.
- 8 The Toolkit is being procured and software solutions are under development, including personal websites. Arrangements are in hand to recruit the additional technical support.

District Council Support Facilities and the Longer Term

- 9 As part of this Workstream programme, an audit of current District Council support facilities for Members in their Civic HQs has been carried out. Subject to the District Councils' own business needs for the next 12 months, it would be extremely helpful if these facilities could also be available to Members of the New Council as locality support centres.
- 10 In the longer term, consistent with the Council's original bid for Unitary Local Government in the County (and the views expressed by both the Councillors' Commission and the Association of North East Councils on the importance of effective support services for Members) as we move through the second transitional phase of reorganisation between May 2008 and April 2009, we should be looking to maximise all available assets to put in place a Member Support Unit serving both County Hall and other locality centres which is fit for purpose and consistent with best practice. These interim proposals provide the basis of a model for that development.

Recommendation

- 11 Members are asked to note progress with the plans to provide additional support facilities at County Hall and to consider the suggestion of also making available District Council facilities where possible and appropriate.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

This report provides an update on plans to provide additional support facilities to Members of the New Council.

Finance

Staffing

Equality and Diversity

Accommodation

Crime and Disorder

Sustainability

Human Rights

Localities and Rurality

Young People

Consultation

Health