

# Report to Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

**7 March 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Member – Officer Relationship Insight
<b>Director:</b>	Surjit Tour Director – Law and Governance
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Rebecca Jenkins Senior Lead – Service Improvement rebecca_jenkins@sandwell.gov.uk

## 1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That the Committee considers and comments upon the proposal for a regular survey to Officer and Members focusing on the health of the Member-Officer Relationship
- 1.2 That the Committee notes that the analysis from the survey will be provided to the Committee to support its governance role

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Linked to the Council's Improvement Plan, work has been taking place focusing on improving the health of the Officer and Member relationship. Recent external reviews from Grant Thornton and the LGA have found that the relationship between Members and Officers has become much-improved.
- 2.2 To ensure the continuous improvement of the relationship there are a number of sources of insight available. It is felt that a regular survey to Officers and Members will bring additional insight and help ensure that changes are embedded.
- 2.3 The views of the Committee are sought on the proposed survey



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Sandwell Council's Improvement Plan focuses on the governance arrangements of the council and areas of improvement across the organisation. The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure that the council is able to deliver on the aims and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. Gaining insight into the health of the Member-Officer relationship and using this to inform future plans and continuous improvement activity will contribute to the effective governance of the council and ensure sustainable improvement. Therefore, this impacts on the council's ability to deliver all the objectives in the Corporate Plan.</p>
	
	
	
	
	

### 4. Context and Key Issues

- 4.1. A positive relationship between Members and Officers is a core feature of an effective and performing council. It was raised by Grant Thornton as an issue in their Value for Money Governance Review, 2021.
- 4.2. The council's Improvement Plan was agreed in June 2022 and this included a workstream within the Organisational Culture Theme focusing on the Member-Officer Relationship.
- 4.3. A range of activity has taken place over 2022 and is continuing to help maintain effective working relationships between Members and Officers. This includes training and ongoing support from the LGA, regular dialogue between Members and Senior Officers (through a set of established meetings), getting to know you sessions for Members and Officers and a programme of all Member briefings.



- 4.4. In late 2022, Grant Thornton and the LGA conducted follow up visits to review the progress of the recommendations made in their earlier reviews. In relation to the Member -Officer Relationship, the reports outlined the positive change that had occurred and was evident.
- 4.5. In their follow up review, Grant Thornton commented that there is:
- Greater stability at political and senior officer level, with positive working relationships between Cabinet and Leadership Team; and commented on
  - Mature engagement between Leader, Cabinet, Committees and senior officers leading to good planning and work programming across committees, and commitment to the council's improvement journey
- 4.6. In their follow up review, the LGA commented that:
- Cabinet and Leadership Team are working increasingly well together; and
  - That one of the most noticeable changes in recent months is a much-improved set of relationships between officers and elected Members.
- 4.7. From a continuous improvement perspective, it is important that we have mechanisms in place to ensure that the relationship remains effective both at senior levels and for all interactions between Officers and Members. The relationship is a key part of embedding a positive organisational culture - the insight serves as an opportunity to identify improvements and as an early warning for any issues occurring.
- 4.8. Sources of insight that are already used include:
- Views of external reviewers
  - Numbers of Standards Cases
  - Feedback from Directors, Group Leaders and Chief Whips
  - Regular survey of Members and Officers attending Scrutiny Boards and/or Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (which will be extended to other committees from next Municipal Year)
- 4.9 This proposal is for a regular survey to Officers and Members to be conducted to provide a 'temperature check' on the relationship. This will supplement the other sources of insight and will help to embed continuous improvement and learning. The insight from the survey will inform future iterations of the Member Development Programme and Learning and Development for Officers.



- 4.10 The survey is proposed to be run twice a year for all Members and Officers in March/April and September/October. It will be reviewed after the first year to ensure that the survey approach remains fit for purpose and is adding value. The survey analysis will be presented to the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee to guide future iterations of the Member Development Programme.
- 4.11 The outline set of question areas to be included in the survey is as follows:
- Frequency of interaction with Members/Officers
  - Perception of current health of the relationship
  - Perception of whether the relationship has improved / stayed the same / become worse
  - Thinking about your last interaction – what worked well, what didn't work well, what would you like to improve
  - Whether any issues have been experienced with the Officer-Member Relationship in the last 6 months
  - Awareness of how to report any issues with the Officer-Member Relationship
- 4.12 Views from the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee are sought on the proposal for the survey and whether any additional question areas would be of interest to the Committee. Views are also sought on how to ensure a good response rate to the survey.
- 4.13 Details from other Local Authorities who have used a regular survey to provide a temperature check on the health of the Officer and Member relationship have been sought and this will further inform the survey planning.
- 4.14 Following discussion at Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee, the proposal will be discussed by Group Leaders and Chief Whips ahead of launching the survey.
- 4.15 In addition to this proposed survey focusing on the Member-Officer relationship, a survey relating to Members' experiences of the customer journey is due to be launched in forthcoming weeks.



## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The proposed survey is planned to be resourced from existing resources within the Service Improvement Team with use of the Citizen Space platform. The resourcing approach will be kept under review.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<p>On 22 March 2022, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued Directions under Section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (the 1999 Act) in order to ensure that the council can comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the 1999 Act. Failure to comply with these Directions may lead to further intervention measures for the council.</p> <p>The delivery of actions within the Plan agreed by Council in June 2022, as well as any subsequently identified actions, will support the council to achieve sustainable improvement. Gaining regular insight into the health of the Officer-Member Relationship will help to ensure that the actions undertaken in this workstream of the Improvement Plan have been embedded and will support continuous improvement.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively deliver its strategic priorities and ensure it is delivering value for money for Sandwell.</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>A risk register is in place and will be maintained for the duration of the Improvement Plan which will underpin the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22).</p> <p>One of the improvement plan risks relates to the performance management framework and the effective monitoring and evidencing of our improvement. The proposed survey will provide insight into the Member-Officer relationship workstream.</p>



<b>Equality:</b>	There are no direct equality, diversity, inclusion implications from the proposed survey. The survey will be open to all staff and Members. Any changes brought forward as a result of the insight gained through the proposed survey will build in consideration of the impact on equalities throughout the development and will include an Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	There are no direct health and wellbeing implications from the proposed survey.
<b>Social Value:</b>	There are no direct social value implications from the proposed survey. The survey is planned to be carried out with existing resources.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	There are no direct climate change implications from the proposed survey. The survey will be provided as an online survey for Members and Officers. There are no plans for distribution via paper-copy.

## 6 Appendices

N/a

## 7. Background Papers

- External Review Reports
  - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report 2022](#)
  - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review December 2021 – reissued October 2022](#)
  - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report 2022](#)
  - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report February 2022](#)
  - [CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report January 2023](#)
  - [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2022](#)

