

SUPPORTING COUNCILLORS: A MANIFESTO FOR COUNCILS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces the Local Government Information Unit's (LGIU) Supporting Councillors: A Manifesto for Councils and seeks Members' views as to whether to support the model resolution, attached as Appendix 2.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The LGIU has been working with affiliate local authorities, across all parties and all types of authority, to develop a manifesto around Supporting Councillors. They have now completed the work and circulated a copy of Supporting Councillors: a Manifesto for Councils (attached as Appendix 1) to all Councils in England with a suggested model resolution (Appendix 2), seeking to gain the support of as many authorities as possible.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The LGIU has been campaigning for a number of years on issues around supporting Councillors, including recognition for the changing role, the need to support Councillors better, and the need to attract more people into the role.
- 3.2 As part of its campaign, the LGIU launched *Supporting Councillors: a Manifesto for Councils*, which was presented to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Local Government in early February. The LGIU point out that it is an opportune time to promote Councillors' issues, with the Government's response to the Councillors Commission report expected in the spring. A raft of measures that will impact on the role of the Councillor is also anticipated, flowing from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.
- 3.3 The LGIU is requesting that all local authorities in England support and act on a dozen practical measures which could better support existing and future Councillors. These are included in the attached appendices. Many of the 12 actions in the manifesto are things that Councils could do now – without needing Government to introduce legislative change. They believe that the more Councils that sign up to the manifesto the clearer the signal will be to Government that Councils are serious about the need to support Councillors in order to continue to have effective Local Government.
- 3.4 They would like to have authorities signed up to the manifesto by the end of March to have the greatest impact and intend to use the weight of support as a tool to influence Government thinking in time for the Government's response to the Councillors Commission report in the Spring.

4 OFFICER COMMENT

- 4.1 Councillors are key to the Local Government process and any initiatives that aim to clarify, strengthen and support their role are, in general, to be

welcomed. Some of the activities listed in the suggested resolution are already being undertaken by this Council, such as increasing Members' opportunities for training and development; however, other issues would require initiatives and support at the national level.

- 4.2 It is interesting that one of the areas highlighted relates to the development of a national framework of allowances. There is already a system in place in Scotland whereby a single body recommends remuneration rates across all the Scottish authorities and a similar type arrangement in England could help provide clarity and consistency over what can sometimes be a difficult local issue to resolve.
- 4.3 Overall, it is felt it would be useful for this Council to endorse the model resolution as outlined so that maximum support is demonstrated across Local Government for securing improvements and support for the role of local Councillors.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Better support to existing and future Councillors could have a positive impact upon the reputation and roles of local Councils and help ensure that the risks associated with the Member decision-making process are minimised.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Board **RESOLVES** to agree to support the model resolution, as outlined in Appendix 2.

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

Background Papers:-

None

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If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.

SUPPORTING COUNCILLORS: A MANIFESTO FOR COUNCILS

The LGiU has been campaigning with local government for almost 25 years. During that time the role of the councillor, as the locally elected representative of their community, has changed enormously. The job is now more time-consuming and complex than ever before. Despite that, for those that do it, it is hugely rewarding.

Helping people to get the services they need and want, making a real difference for the people they live and work amongst is satisfaction enough for some. However many younger and newer councillors are finding it more difficult to carry out the time-consuming voluntary work they do for the council and their political work because they just can't do it effectively alongside their work, home and family life.

The LGiU is urging government to make changes and has contributed to the work of the Councillors Commission report, *Representing the Future*, and the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group's report, *The Role of Councillors*, on many of these issues.

Councils, as well as government and political parties, can help people to be active and effective councillors, which in turn supports local people to have an active role in the development and delivery of services in their community. Effective councillors are key to effective community engagement.

Signing up to this manifesto means supporting actions that would help make a real difference to existing and future councillors so that more people could seriously consider taking on the role. We believe it is the only way to ensure that local people have a really excellent choice in who represents them and how well communities are able to be represented.

For further information, please visit our website www.lgiu.gov.uk or contact Tracy Gardiner on 020 7554 2836 or email tracy.gardiner@lgiu.org.uk

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LGiU
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION UNIT



SUPPORTING COUNCILLORS: A MANIFESTO FOR COUNCILS

INDEPENDENT INTELLIGENT INFLUENTIAL

SUPPORTING COUNCILLORS: A MANIFESTO FOR COUNCILS

In promoting this manifesto the LGiU is asking all councils and councillors to implement our 12 action points

- 1** Promote greater awareness and understanding of what a councillor does so that more people know why they are needed and why they are important.
- 2** Provide information to all those who work closely with the council to know more about how councillors can get things done, and the limits of their powers.
- 3** Provide clear information that explains how to become a councillor and the responsibilities involved.
- 4** Provide training after elections so that members are able to become excellent councillors with a good understanding of the role and responsibilities.
- 5** Call upon government to revise the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity* so that councils can more actively encourage and better support councillors to communicate with the public.
- 6** Call upon government to ensure councillors and local government have all the powers and constitutional reforms they need to be able to get things done.
- 7** Develop mechanisms that devolve resources so that local councillors can effectively influence spending in their locality in line with their community leadership role.
- 8** Support the development and implementation of a charter containing minimum standards of support to help local councillors carry out their councillor responsibilities effectively.
- 9** Develop with councillors a clear role definition which sets out the main functions and duties and typical demands of being a councillor. The role definition should also help to explain the councillor's role to the public.
- 10** Support the development of a voluntary national framework of allowances set by an independent panel. The panel should take into account differences in types and sizes of authorities and duties of councillors to benchmark allowances. Councils should consider the framework when setting their own allowances schemes.
- 11** Review arrangements for working with councillors so that councils adopt modern ways of working, including making best use of technology.
- 12** Work with businesses to help working councillors to manage their work/ council time better; work with local employers to support employees who become councillors as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes and to help them gain public recognition for it; and publicise the many skills that being a councillor brings to the workplace, to the local authority, to the employee and the benefits that this can bring to employers.

* For more information on the Code see the LGiU publication, *The Right Side of the Law*

BY SUPPORTING AND ACTING ON THIS MANIFESTO YOU WILL HAVE:

- Ensured government listens and acts on the problems facing local councillors
- Helped explain what a councillor does and why they are important
- Helped councillors to represent their local constituents
- Strengthened democracy and encouraged an excellent range of local candidates

Suggested Model Council Resolution

That this Council considers councillors have a valuable representative role which helps to ensure that local people have an active role in the development and delivery of council services.

That this Council welcomes the LGiU's document *Supporting Councillors: A manifesto for supporting councillors*; considers it important to support actions that would help make a real difference to existing and future councillors; calls on the government to introduce measures to help people be active and effective councillors; and agrees to support and act on the following twelve action points so that local democracy is strengthened:

- 1) Promote greater awareness and understanding of what a councillor does so that more people know why they are needed and why they are important.
- 2) Provide information to all those who work closely with the council to know more about how councillors can get things done, and the limits of their powers.
- 3) Provide clear information that explains how to become a councillor and the responsibilities involved.
- 4) Provide training after elections so that members are able to become excellent councillors with a good understanding of the role and responsibilities.
- 5) Call upon government to revise the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity so that councils can more actively encourage and better support councillors to communicate with the public.
- 6) Call upon government to ensure councillors and local government have all the powers and constitutional reforms they need to be able to get things done.
- 7) Develop mechanisms that devolve resources so that local councillors can effectively influence spending in their locality in line with their community leadership role.
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- 10) Support the development of a voluntary national framework of allowances set by an independent panel. The panel should take into account differences in types and sizes of authorities and duties of councillors to benchmark allowances. Councils should consider the framework when setting their own allowances schemes.
- 11) Review arrangements for working with councillors so that councils adopt modern ways of working, including making best use of technology.
- 12) Work with businesses to help working councillors to manage their work / council time better; work with local employers to support employees who become councillors as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes and to help them gain public recognition for it; and publicise the many skills that being a councillor brings to the workplace, to the local authority, to the employee and the benefits that this can bring to employers.