

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PANEL – 15 APRIL 2008

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 17 DECEMBER 2007

PROTOCOL FOR COUNCILLORS' WEBSITE

An officer presented a report of the Director of Business Transformation and Customer Services, which set out proposals for a protocol for Councillors writing information and/or including material on the Internet pages such as web logs or blogs. The Committee was requested to approve the protocol and recommend that Council formally adopt the Protocol for inclusion in the Council's Constitution.

The officer explained that the protocol was based on a series of legislation and advised that a protocol was necessary. One Member expressed the view that Members needed to be properly supported in updating Internet pages. This included support with technical elements.

The Chairman noted that blogs were inherently controversial and suggested the option of a link to the Councillor blog outside the main Harrow Council website. An independent member expressed concern about Part 4D and 4E of the protocol, which he felt could lead to complaints.

In response to questions, the officer confirmed that:

- information regarding Councillors was available on the Harrow Council Website but it was not in an easily accessible format;
- Harrow was moving towards 'lively' web pages and then blogs;
- work would be within the existing Web budget.

An independent member expressed the view that a complete 'commitment sheet' was necessary, to ensure the project was properly funded. The Chairman noted that it was appropriate for the issue of funding to be referred to the relevant Portfolio Holder. Some Members expressed concern over the checking of the Web pages and expressed further concerns about the proposals.

The Director of Legal and Governance Services questioned whether the protocol would be acceptable to Members of the Committee for just the 'lively' web pages. The Chairman expressed the view that the protocol should be re-considered once the web pages were active. The Chairman noted that it would be useful for Members of the Committee to look at the London Borough of Lambeth's Website. One Member expressed the view that the proposed protocol could be built into Members' Code of Conduct training.

RESOLVED: That, in light of the comments made in the preamble above, the protocol not be approved, but should be referred to the Director of Business Transformation and Customer Services and the Member Development Panel for further consideration. That consideration should include whether a better way forward is to have links to external sites for political matters, the practice and experience at Lambeth, funding and training for Councillors.