

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

To: Executive
Date: 22 February 2010
Item for: Decision
Item of: Overview and Scrutiny Core Committee
Chairman

Item Title

A REVIEW OF SUPPORT TO THE MAYORALTY

Background

Arising from scrutiny of the budget (2009/10) Scrutiny Members noted that financial support to the civic budget was increasing but had some concerns about the current support to the Mayoralty.

As a result of this a Scrutiny Task Group conducted a Review into the current support to the Mayoralty.

At its meeting of 15 December 2009 Overview & Scrutiny Core Committee agreed that an action plan relating the review recommendations be developed. This has happened with the support of the Executive Member for Transformation & Resources and the Director of Legal & Democratic services.

Recommendation(s)

The Executive is requested to –

- (1) Consider the report and action plan;
- (2) Respond in accordance with the agreed protocols.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Samuel Martin

Extension: 4014

Background Papers:

None

A Review of Support to the Mayoralty

Chairman's Introduction:

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Mayoralty Task Group which details the findings and recommendations following the Group's review into the current support to the Mayoralty. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Task Group Members, previous Mayors of the Authority and officers for contributing to the Review.

It is without question that the Mayoralty is held in the highest regard at Trafford Council. This is the primary motivation behind wanting to ensure that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are well supported during their year of Office.

Throughout the Review, I have heard detailed accounts from previous Mayors of their year of Office and how they fulfilled their role as Mayor of Trafford. It became clear that although the Mayor is a fixed institution within the Council, the person that fulfils that role has the ability to shape their Mayoral year as they see fit.

The findings of the Review, contained within this report, provide insight into the needs of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor during their year of Office and that the recommendations made provide practical measures to improve the way in which the needs of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are met.

Why Was The Review Undertaken?

Arising from scrutiny of the budget (2009/10) Members noted that financial support to the civic budget was increasing but had some concerns about the current support to the Mayoralty.

'The Working Group welcomes the increase in funding in the area of the Mayoralty however; it has some general concerns regarding the current support to this function. It is agreed Scrutiny should be involved in a review of the Mayoralty and its administration, with a view to ensuring the office of the Mayor is fully supported to enable the mayor to carry out his/her duties effectively'.

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Management
Committee – Budget Scrutiny 2009/10

As a result of this, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee established a Task Group to conduct a Review into the current support to the Mayoralty.

Composition of the Task Group:

The Task Group comprised of the following Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Core Committee: –

Councillor S. Anstee (Chairman);
Councillor D. Acton (Vice Chairman);
Councillor Mrs. P. Dixon;
Councillor R. Bowker.

Objectives and Sub Objectives:

The objective of the review was to examine the current support to the Mayoralty and if appropriate, suggest how it could be improved within existing resources.

The sub objectives of the review were to understand: -

- What processes currently supported the Mayor;
- Where support could be improved;
- How other Authorities are managing support to the Mayoralty.

Method of Research:

1. Consideration of the current financial resource for the Mayoralty;
2. Benchmarking exercise to ascertain how the civic office is supported at other, comparable authorities;
3. Consideration of the roles and responsibilities of Mayor and Deputy Mayor;
4. Interviews with previous Mayors;
5. Evidence from the Director of Legal and Democratic Services;

Evidence Gathered:

Arising from the evidence given to the Task Group from Councillors Adshead, Sharp and Mrs. Ward as previous Mayors of the Authority on 4 November 2009 and experiential accounts from Task Group Members Councillor Bowker and Mrs. Dixon, three distinct themes emerged -

1. Secretarial support;
2. Transport;
3. Attendant support

The following evidence was gathered in relation to the three areas identified by Members.

Secretarial support

On 4 November the Task Group met with a group of previous Mayors and heard where there were gaps in officer support to the Mayoralty. As a result the Task Group, in conjunction with the previous Mayors, identified a number of essential criteria for the post:

1. Excellent diary management skills;
2. The ability to develop good working relationships with colleagues in other departments to ensure the effective procurement of goods and services;
3. Basic research skills;
4. Expert training and knowledge of Mayoral protocol and procedure.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised the Task Group that the Mayor's Office is run on a day to day basis by a Senior Business Support Officer and they are, in turn, supported by a Business Support Officer who deals with daily engagements. These officers are part of the wider Business Support team and other team members provide additional support if needed and cover for leave or sickness. It was reported to the Task Group that all staff who work in the Mayor's office are explained the relevant protocols, procedures, roles and responsibilities in order for them to carry out their duties.

From the benchmarking exercise, in which five comparable Authorities were approached, all five have a specialist officer in the form of a Civic/Mayors/Members Secretary.

Recommendation One:

That officer support is further developed and there is a dedicated lead officer that possesses the essential criteria for the post as identified by Members.

Protocols and Procedures:

Previous Mayors emphasised the importance of the protocols and procedures linked to the Mayoralty and recognised it was essential that all officers dealing with the Mayoralty receive appropriate training.

Recommendation Two:

That the dedicated lead officer and any officers likely to be involved in support to the Mayoralty receive appropriate training on protocols and procedures associated with the Mayoralty.

Recommendation Three:

That the Mayoral Handbook be created in a wall chart format, as a quick guide for the Mayoral team to use where appropriate and is to feature the following areas: –

- Mayoral protocol and procedure
- The role of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor
- Key telephone numbers
- Speeches.

Communication Arrangements:

This was seen as a key element of supporting the Mayoralty. The Task Group were advised, by previous Mayors, that the Mayoralty changes from year to year depending on how the Mayor wished to represent the Borough. This flexibility required good communication and an awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the Mayor and Deputy, and those supporting them, so that expectations are met. As a result of this, it becomes clear from the outset what the arrangements are for communicating essential information to and from the Mayor and their Deputy.

Recommendation Four:

That a formal meet and greet between the Mayor elect and Deputy Mayor elect, dedicated officer and other officers supporting the Mayoralty, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance is organised, before installation, to set out everyone's roles and responsibilities and to ensure that the expectations of both the Mayor and the officers are met. Further to this, a documented, formal de-brief with all the parties mentioned in this recommendation is to be organised after Annual Council with the out-going Mayor.

Mayoralty Working Group:

Members identified that the experiences and practical knowledge gained by previous Mayors could be passed on to the current Mayor, his/her Deputy and specialist officer. An additional resource which would increase efficiency and support to the Office is the re-establishment of the Mayoralty Working Group. Councillors felt that the re-establishment of this Group, with an appropriate remit, will aim to give some responsibility for the Mayoralty back to Members.

Previous Mayors had some concerns that amendments had been made to the Mayoral handbook and would, in future, wish to be consulted on any changes due to their potential impact on the Mayoralty.

Recommendation Five:

That the Mayoralty Working Group be re-established with a terms of reference which gives the current Mayor and Deputy, previous Mayors and the specialist officer the following responsibilities: -

- To offer insight and assistance to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor;
- That changes to the Mayoral Handbook are produced in consultation with the Mayoralty Working Group;
- To monitor the occasions when Mayoral engagements were not accepted due to the lack of an attendant or transport;
- That any issues arising from the Mayoral de-brief be reported back to the Group;
- That the number of meetings are to be agreed by the Mayoralty Working Group but not less than two a year.

Mayors Charity

Arising from the meeting on 4 November it became apparent that there is a lack of clarity about the role of support staff in relation to the Mayor's charity.

Recommendation Six:

To avoid misunderstanding, the position of support staff in relation to the Mayor's charity is clarified and the Mayor's charity section within the Mayoral Handbook is revised to reflect this.

Transport

Previous Mayors were of the view that the last Mayoral car was unreliable and, on occasion, invitations were declined as a result of the car being unavailable.

Through the examination of the civic budget for 2009/10, Members were advised that the budget for the civic car was £17,501. Members were further advised that the budget was initially set to accrue a vehicle replacement budget as well as to pay Trafford's transport department for the costs for the primary vehicle.

Coinciding with Scrutiny's Review, a new¹ Mayoral vehicle was purchased following a full cost analysis and Task Group Members and previous Mayors welcomed a more reliable vehicle.

As a result of securing a saving from the purchase of a vehicle, there was provision in the budget for a hire car in the event of the primary vehicle being unavailable. This would therefore ensure that an appropriate vehicle was

¹ The replacement vehicle is not brand new. Following the cost analysis it was the best possible use of financial resources to buy a used vehicle.

available for the Mayor and the Deputy, in some cases, to attend engagements at the same time.

Attendant support

The Task Group heard from the previous Mayors that attendant support, at Trafford, was excellent.

There was a view within the Task Group that engagements were not accepted due to a lack of attendant support, however, Members noted that there was no firm evidence to suggest that the lack of attendants were contributing to the number of missed engagements. However, in order to accurately monitor the amount of engagements missed, and the reasons why they were missed, Members acknowledged that the facility to monitor why invitations were declined be explored.

Recommendation Seven:

That a record of the amount of invitations received, the amount of invitations declined and the reasons why they were declined is kept.

The benchmarking exercise showed that at other Authorities there were varying degrees of attendant support. At three Authorities there are two or more full time attendants who provide Mayoral support. At one Authority there was one attendant and at another, there were usually two, however one post was vacant.

Trafford Council employs 1.6 full time equivalent attendants. This equates to fifty eight hours of attendant support per week and when either attendant is unavailable a relief driver is called upon from the facilities department.

Members were concerned that, whilst every effort is made to train relief staff in protocols and procedures, when a relief driver is called upon there wasn't sufficient training for them to carry out their duties. Further to this, previous Mayors wished to ensure that every effort is made to have a contingency plan in the event of either attendant being unavailable.

Recommendation Eight:

That an AGMA pool of trained attendants be explored to ensure that staff are always available to support the Mayor and/or Deputy Mayor carry out their duties with the highest level of support and dignity.

Recommendation Nine:

That a member of the public with full experience of the Mayoralty be called upon to assist the Mayor or Deputy Mayor carry out their duties in the absence of an attendant be explored.

Conclusions

The Task Group were of the opinion that all the recommendations detailed in this report would streamline the ways in which support is given to the Mayoralty.

The benchmarking exercise proved useful to highlight that neighbouring Councils have recognised the value of a specialist post which offers support to the Mayoralty.

Arising from the telephone conversations with these designated officers, the post itself is not just an administrative officer but a trained point of contact and a cradle of knowledge and support. It is this resource which is vital to any civic office. Further to this, Members wished to acknowledge, wholeheartedly, the support given by attendants. Their role is key to ensuring the Mayor or Deputy Mayor maintains the highest level of dignity and support when in the Borough and afar. In addition, the solution of transport, in the form of the purchase of a new Mayoral vehicle, was welcomed.

It is evident that the role of Mayor of Trafford is one which is very close to the hearts of Members who have occupied the post. Those Members possess a desire to ensure that future Mayors and their Deputies are well supported through adequate secretarial, transportation and attendant support. Further to this, they wish to ensure that progress is made on these recommendations which are pivotal to ensuring a well functioning civic office.

Recommendation Nine:

That in order to meet the recommendations outlined above, an action plan outlining the methods and timescales of delivery be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Core Committee on 31 March 2010 by the appropriate officer.