

## Theme Advisors – Proposed Protocol

1. Theme Advisors have evolved in this Council as a result of:
  - (a) national initiatives in connection with the development of services or as a result of new legislation.
  - (b) initiatives taken by this Council in wishing to focus Member activity on certain aspects of the Council's business and functions

### The Appointment and Role of a Theme Advisor?

2. A Theme Advisor is an elected member appointed by the Council to provide a focus on a specific area of the Council's business or a community need to ensure it is given due regard in relation to the activities of the Council and of its partners in local governance.
3. A Theme Advisor will be a non-executive Member.
4. The Council at its annual meeting will identify interests to be championed and will appoint named Councillors to champion one specific interest.
5. Within the context of the interest being championed, and as part of their overall and individual community leadership responsibilities:
  - a Theme Advisor will be expected to exert influence on those within the Council who make executive decisions and on other members of the Council in the context of full Council, regulatory and overview and scrutiny functions
  - a Theme Advisor will be expected to exert influence on relevant external partners and bodies in their decision making and planning
  - a Theme Advisor will act as a catalyst for change and improvement
  - a Theme Advisor will work with others within the Council to maintain efficient, effective and relevant services and policies.
6. By appointing a member as Theme Advisor, the Council is empowering that member to act in that capacity. It follows, therefore, that the Council should put in place such arrangements as it thinks appropriate to support the Theme Advisor in that capacity.
7. The role of a Theme Advisor allows members to develop skills that will equip them to progress within the Council and prepare them for future leadership positions. It also gives non-executive members an opportunity to engage more fully with policy development.

### The Parameters of the Theme Advisor Role

8. The above role is set in the context of the specific interest or theme. The following parameters apply to the role.
9. All Theme Advisors must act reasonably in the role.
10. All Theme Advisors must recognise and work effectively within the political management and executive working arrangements agreed by the Council.

11. A Champion who is NOT an executive member:

- is effectively given authority by the Council to take all reasonable actions judged by the member as being necessary to perform the role of Theme Advisor.
- cannot commit the Council in any way that is contrary to established policy and practice, but may confirm a Council position as stated in published policy
- cannot make decisions that bind the Council
- is entitled to have access to information held by the Council's officers relating to the interest being championed and access to a reasonable amount of officer time to discuss that information but may not commit officer time to such an extent that other priority work required of officers is prejudiced.
- should agree with a nominated lead officer a programme of activity for a Council Year, with SMART targets (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound), that can be generally endorsed and will set out clearly the areas of activity, which the Theme Advisor can be expected to be involved in and for which practical support can be given.
- the work programme must reflect the Council's corporate priorities, but the Theme Advisor may include such other aspects as seem to him/her to be relevant for immediate attention, as long as overall priorities are not directly prejudiced by those aspects.

#### **What the Council Will Put in Place to Support Theme Advisors**

12. taking all the above into account, the Council will:

- take steps to promote understanding within the Council of the role of a Theme Advisor, and how it relates to other member level functions
- promote similar understanding among its working partners, external bodies and the local community
- require the Chief Executive to designate an appropriate lead officer to support or mentor each appointed Theme Advisor.
- ensure that the all senior managers are aware of the Theme Advisor roles that affect them and the rights of the Theme Advisor to access/discuss information about the service
- require each Theme Advisor to report annually to the Council about their programme of activity and how they have contributed to the achievement of the Council's overall priorities.
- invite the Theme Advisor to act as its representative on some or all of the relevant external bodies where Council representation is required or sought.
- put in place appropriate skills development for Theme Advisors within the overall Member Development Policy of the Council, which could include attendance on the Executive Development Programme.

- in conjunction with the independent Members' Allowances Panel, keep under review the relevance of the role of Theme Advisors in the context of the Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances.

### Internal Working Relationships

#### 13. The Theme Advisor will:

- liaise regularly with executive members whose portfolios are relevant to the role,
- monitor the Executive Forward Plan and seek information from the relevant officers and executive members about forthcoming business and exert influence on behalf of the interest
- be aware of the Scrutiny Work Programme, support pre-decision scrutiny, and seek information and offer views on relevant review subjects and exert influence on behalf of the interest
- serve where appropriate on corporate working groups relating to their area of responsibility
- take advice from the appointed lead officer and other relevant officers.
- seek to place appropriate items on member meeting agendas
- keep other councillors up-to-date with activities within the interest
- generally work only to the programme of activity they have agreed with their lead officer
- in all the above, recognise the limited capacity of officers to support the Theme Advisor role alongside the demands of all other member and Council functions and will, therefore, make reasonable allowance for this.
- generally promote the interest

#### 14. Executive members will:

- acknowledge the right of Theme Advisors to be consulted on matters relating to their interest
- ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with the Theme Advisors in the formulation of policy and other executive matters and that any views are contained in the information provided to decision makers
- consider inviting the relevant Theme Advisor to represent the Council at any relevant conference/seminar on the subject matter of the interest on the basis that the Theme Advisor will report back to the executive member.
- take full account of any views offered by Theme Advisor prior to any executive decision making on matters within the interest and demonstrate this in the record of the decision
- co-operate with Theme Advisors in the formulation and delivery of the action plan they have agreed with their lead officer, where this will not prejudice executive priorities

15. Scrutiny Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairmen will:

- acknowledge the right of Theme Advisors to be consulted and to participate in discussions on matters relating to their interest
- ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with Theme Advisors in the formulation of policy and in service review activity
- ensure Theme Advisors are specifically invited to be contributors to any reviews that have a direct bearing on the interest (recognising the right of a Theme Advisor to attend as an observer at any such session)
- ensure an opportunity is provided for Theme Advisors to contribute to or comment on the work programme of the Scrutiny Committee.

16. Officers will:

- acknowledge the right of Theme Advisors to be consulted and to participate in discussions on matters relating to their interest
- ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with relevant Theme Advisors where the issue clearly relates to the interest
- co-operate fully with Theme Advisors in enabling them to perform their functions and to discuss directly with Theme Advisors and Portfolio Holders where proposed actions might prejudice Council or other priorities
- explain fully and openly to Theme Advisors any issues of capacity relating to the role of supporting the Theme Advisor function
- work with Theme Advisors in the formulation of a programme of activity that is consistent with what the Council wishes to achieve and recognise the right of the Theme Advisor to focus on other aspects (by agreement)

### **Conflict Resolution**

17. In the event that there is disagreement between the Theme Advisor and either an officer or a member (for example over priorities for action or access to information) the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council shall determine the matter.

### **External Working Relationships**

18. The Theme Advisor will:

- need to acknowledge that there is no statutory authority for the Theme Advisor role
- need to recognise that the Council does have some working relationships with outside bodies arising from legal provisions
- monitor and work closely with partner bodies in the field of the interest being championed
- communicate on behalf of the 'interest' group and the Council to outside bodies

- may be the Council's representative on certain relevant external bodies
- identify the most relevant community bodies whose work is associated with the interest and foster good working relationships with those groups
- take steps to promote within the wider community the specific issues on which the Theme Advisor is to focus and to provide opportunities for local engagement, involving executive and scrutiny members as appropriate