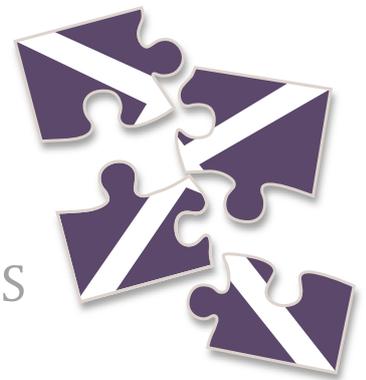


# SCOTTISH MEMBERS' SERVICES DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



## Newsletter, November 2017

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## Report by the Chair of SMSDN



Colleagues, it has been a great pleasure to Chair the Network over the past couple of years and I was honoured to have been nominated as chair again at our AGM in September.

I want to thank the secretaries, Alison Cumming and Pauline Bolson who have been of immeasurable help to me during my time as Chair and we've worked as a team to deliver for SMSDN.

I'm sure we have all been going through a great period of transition since our local government elections in May and the resulting new intake of Elected Members. I know from our meeting in September that we are all experiencing similar issues and this is where the Network has a clear benefit for our members as it is always good to know that we are not alone especially when we're dealing with the more challenging aspects of our jobs!

We know that there are ongoing significant budget pressures for all of our Councils which is why we have kept our affiliation fees at the low cost of £50 per annum. It is at these times of financial difficulties that being able to share our experiences and learn from each other is of significant value and can often provide means of saving time and money.

The network meetings are a fantastic source of information, and we supplement this with a wealth of experience and resources via our pages on the Knowledge Hub. I have noticed a great improvement on our use of this facility and the feedback has been positive where colleagues have been able to source responses from across the country to particular issues they're having in their council.

We took the decision to delay our Seminar and to hold it biennially rather than annually. We are setting up a short-term working group to review the structure and source valuable speakers and guests that will offer the best possible experience for our members. We hope to be in a position in the New Year to announce the date and theme for our 2018 Seminar!

I want to give special thanks to the Improvement Service and to David Barr in particular who has been invaluable to our network and provided so much vital support and assistance to us. We have a great relationship with them and I look forward to continuing to work together in our support for Elected Members across Scotland.

# Democratic Services is Team of the Year!



Congratulations to the Democratic Services team from Scottish Borders Council for its success at the Society of Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland (SOLAR) Conference in March. A ceremony took place in Aberdeen to recognise the talent and good practice in lawyers and administrators in local authorities across Scotland and SBC won the inaugural Democratic Services Team of the Year Award against stiff competition from Dundee Legal Team and Aberdeenshire Governance Review Team.

In their submission, the team referred to their work supporting the now paperless committees, dealing with over 200 meetings

per year; providing support to all Councillors; providing constitutional and election advice to 69 community councils; supporting the work of the three Lord-Lieutenants; processing street naming and number and property clearance requests; all this along with administering elections and referenda.

Tracey Logan, Chief Executive of SBC, said: "The Democratic Services Team is such a cohesive unit, willing to provide help and carry out any duty which comes their way, and always with a smile on their faces. They are a credit to the Council and thoroughly deserve this recognition."

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## Chair's Report

We have attempted to concentrate on particular themes at our meetings and I plan to continue this approach to our meetings and our focus for the forthcoming December meeting is training on Inclusive Communication which I'm sure everyone will agree is a very worthwhile topic.

Our main focus for the past 18 months has been the 2017 Local Government Elections and I know the discussions we had as a Network were vital for the preparatory work in my own council. I think we should now concentrate on reviewing and developing our Business Plan so that we have a clear strategy for what we want the Network to accomplish over the coming years and I look forward to working with our membership to achieve our shared goals.

## Date for Your Diary

### SMSDN Training Day – Inclusive Communication

Glasgow City Council  
Friday, 1 December, 2017

**GOT A QUESTION?**  
Ask the 105 members of the SMSDN Khub group

## Knowledgehub

SMSDN has an online group page on the Knowledge Hub, the UK's largest public service collaboration platform. It's a place where members of the network go to exchange knowledge, experiences and ideas, and create connections with their fellow network members in a secure environment.

The Khub group is restricted to local authorities affiliated to the SMSDN and access to the group is one of the benefits of the affiliation fee.

<https://khub.net/group/scottishmembersservicesdevelopmentnetworksmsdn>

# Members Portal keeps East Renfrewshire on the case

Margaret Pettigrew, Members Services, East Renfrewshire Council



I would like to take this opportunity to give an example of good practise where being part of the SMSDN and being able to use the Knowledge Hub can be of benefit to its members. A query was raised by a local authority on how and if other authorities recorded elected members' enquiries and complaints. This also raised the question about how enquiries from MPs and MSPs were dealt with.

Various responses were received on the Knowledge Hub from "no councillor enquiries are

recorded or statistics kept" to a number of bespoke systems purchased from various providers. With regard to my Council, East Renfrewshire, we created our own Caseload Management System specifically for members that was adapted from our Lagan system – we called it the Members Portal.

This portal allows members to log enquiries from constituents within their Ward. The enquiry goes straight to the Department concerned and members are able to decide whether they wish to make the response themselves from the information supplied by the Department or to allow the Department to respond on their behalf. Members are able to see at a glance all cases which they have logged and if there are any

cases awaiting a response from the Department. Importantly, this system also allows the Council to capture the data from these enquiries.

We were approached by colleagues in other authorities who asked if they could come and view our Members Portal and we were happy to oblige.

I am pleased to say that I know of at least one authority who has adopted our system and aim to have it live after the election.

When block e-mails are sent out with requests for information the responses can be lost in the information super highway. When you use the Knowledge Hub to communicate and share knowledge with each other the information is captured and can be accessed months or years later and may in turn save our councils money.

## National Association of Civic Officers

Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer, East Renfrewshire Council; and Clerk to the Renfrewshire Lieutenancy

The National Association of Civic Officers (NACO), membership of which is free, aims to promote excellence in local authority civic offices throughout the United Kingdom through a network of professionals involved in this field. I, and many others involved in civic work from a number of Scottish local authorities, welcomed the chance to attend NACO's first ever Scottish training event in Perth on 19 October led by its Vice-Chair, Jim Babbington.

During the event, we had

very useful opportunities not only to consider and discuss options in terms of approaching preparations that could be required at a local level in the event of the death of a senior national figure, but also to consider best value within and objectives of civic offices. To complement these parts of the day, we were provided with valuable opportunities to network with colleagues from elsewhere on addressing a range of other matters dealt with by officers involved in civic work

and on how to tackle various related issues than can emerge from time to time.

If you have not done so already, I would encourage you to have a look at the NACO website ([www.naco.uk.com](http://www.naco.uk.com)), consider what NACO can offer and apply for membership. Linked to this you will, for example, be provided with valuable information through its regular newsletters; networking, coaching and training opportunities; and access to a range of valuable resources and information.



## Aberdeenshire Council's Ward Pages

*Alison Cumming, Area Committee Officer, Aberdeenshire Council*



Aberdeenshire Council, in consultation with Councillors, established a need to have an efficient and effective way to communicate with Councillors that would complement their work and aid efficiency.

In late 2011, Aberdeenshire Council launched Ward Pages, an internally developed system directly targeted at the provision of information and communication with Councillors. All of the information provided was fully personalised to individual Councillors.

Following the 2012 election, Aberdeenshire Council confirmed Ward Pages as the primary way to communicate and consult with Councillors and this was endorsed by the Chief Executive and Directors. This required a change of culture and ways of working for both officers and Councillors, but the initial feedback was good. Officers immediately saw efficiencies in process and the system continued to be developed to enhance these.

Due to changes in Council ICT provision, it became necessary to redevelop Ward Pages on a new platform in late 2016. Again, the plan was to have new provision

in place for newly elected Councillors after the May 2017 election. However, this time we were able to use the knowledge that had been gained about how the tools provided were used and the improvements to technology to develop a system that was simple and easy to use, but could be accessed by Councillors anywhere that had internet access. Our measure for success was that Councillors wouldn't need guidance on how to use it as it would be intuitive. That has now been put to the test and it works well.

Given that the Council has in excess of 15,000 employees and training would not be easy, the Development Team was committed to making the system so easy to use that Officers and Councillors would be able to use it without the need for training or the provision of a manual. A bold move perhaps, but with over a 50% turnover of Councillors at the election, it has been proven possible. Indeed, newly-elected Councillor McKelvie said "I was elected as a new Councillor in 2017, but went on a pre-planned holiday a few days after the election. Despite having no training, I was able to access Ward

Pages on my Council smartphone to respond to consultations and receive information whilst in my hotel in the Mediterranean, allowing me to keep-up-to-date with activity in my ward."

Ward Pages has removed the need to e-mail large documents to each of the 70 Councillors and allows Councillors to see the information relevant to them in a searchable system, but also to access all other non-confidential information should they want to. It provides an auditable consultation tool which provides a specific planning consultation system that requires limited officer input, but allows officers to easily and quickly comply with requirements of their delegated powers. It also pulls through useful information from, and provides links to, other Council systems.

The one-stop shop approach will continue to be developed, with the Team continuing to consult and engage with Councillors to bring further tools to support them within Ward Pages. The Team will look to simplify and streamline process to allow efficiencies to be achieved throughout the organisation.

# “Better Use of Digital” Workshops for Elected Members in Glasgow



Digital technology is transforming our world, and the world of our elected members' constituents. "IT" is no longer "back office" equipment that sits on top of a desk. We carry it, we are immersed within it. Our world is becoming increasingly digital. In our personal lives it keeps us informed, it helps us to keep in touch, it entertains us and it makes it easier to find products and services, transact with organisations, and it can even now allow us to control devices in our home. Constituents themselves have ever increasing expectations for how they might engage with the Council and their elected members.

Despite the advances in digital technology and Glasgow's increasing reputation for digital innovation, the potential to use digital technologies to enhance how elected members fulfil their ward-level and Council-level duties has not yet been fully explored. There have been improvements to the IT provided to elected members (and there are existing plans to improve this further) but there has not been a full review of the opportunity that digital technology could bring to the role of an elected member. Opportunities to explore might

include the use of social media and digital participation tools, "virtual surgeries" using live chat and/or video conferencing, the development of ward profiles (that might include asset/service maps) to better help understand the communities that they serve, etc.

## Aims and Objectives

This programme of work intends to address that. It aims to engage elected members (and potentially constituents) in a structured process to:

- Gain a greater understanding of how elected members might better use digital technology to serve communities and constituents at a ward-level, and fulfil Council-level duties,
- Build a community of willing participants to explore how digital technology can enhance the role of elected members, and to help to "co-design" new digital solutions
- Explore how digital technology is being used differently by elected members elsewhere across Scotland, the UK, and across the world,
- Understand (and develop plans for overcoming) the challenges

of (and barriers to) using digital tools,

- Identify opportunities to demonstrate the potential early through "quick win" projects,
- Begin to develop a "roadmap" for further enhancing the suite of digital tools that are made available to elected members

## Approach

The first step in the process will be an initial (facilitated) workshop with elected members. Despite the topic, the programme of work will try to avoid technical jargon and too much focus on technology. It will focus on:

1. the needs of elected members
2. the needs of constituents

It will subsequently explore how modern technology might help fulfil those needs. It will deliver this by using formal approaches for undertaking "user research" and "service design" currently being developed across the Scottish public sector.

We are jointly collaborating on this programme of work with both the [Digital Office for Local Government](#) and the Scottish Government's User Research and Service Design team.

It is anticipated that a smaller working group of elected members will be identified to continue to collaborate with officers to take the findings further and develop action plans, which will report progress to the Council's Business Bureau.

Glasgow will share the lessons from running the workshops with other Councils.