

MEETING RE PROPOSED DEMOCRATIC SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Held at South East Employers, Winchester 31/1/08

Attended: John Austin - L B of Enfield (Chair), Sue Keogh – South East Employers, John Lynch – LB of Islington, Derek Bishop – National Scrutiny Network, Yuniea Semambo – LB Haringey, Helen Parker – East Hampshire DC

Apologies: Clive Parker – Buckinghamshire CC, Mark Towers – Blackpool BC, Mary Clarke – East Sussex CC

Background

John welcomed everyone and provided a brief background to the meeting. He explained that there is an identified need for a professional body for Democratic Services and that there is support in the sector for such a body with a potential market of 10,000 members. He updated those present on the possible new qualifications for Democratic Services and said that the Association could have a role in shaping the new qualifications and setting future standards. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) is supportive of a new professional body and is happy to share their expertise and experience.

Discussion

There then followed a discussion on the merits of setting up an Association of which the main points are listed below:

- We need to sell the benefits of an Association to Local Authorities so they 'require' staff to join and work towards a qualification
- An Association would help with the professionalisation of the sector and would help Authorities respond to changing demands
- It would provide a central body for lobbying and for consultation
- It would provide a forum for networking and could lead to an annual conference tailored to those working in Democratic Services
- We need to manage expectations and develop short term and long-term aims
- It could help with recruitment and retention issues in the sector
- We would need funding to establish the association, possibly through sponsorship
- Membership and qualifications need to be affordable

Aims of the Association

It was proposed that the short-term aims should be as follows:

- To raise the profile and professional standing of Democratic Services
- To promote the National Vocational Qualifications in Democratic Services and any future qualifications
- To share best practice and establish forums for networking

Longer-term aims could be:

To be the professional body for the Democratic Services Sector

To act as a consultative and lobbying group

To develop strategies to help with recruitment and retention

To be the standard setting body for the new Democratic Services qualifications

The following action points were then agreed:

ACTION	WHO
Talk to AEA to find out how they started	JL, JA
Draw up a list of benefits to 'sell' the Association to Local Authorities	JL
Draw up short-term and long-term aims for the Association	SK
Set up a national database of interested parties (All to send contacts to Sue)	SK All
Circulate summary of meeting, including on SEE website	SK
Request slot at South East Employers on 19 th June to promote the concept of an Association	SK
Design leaflet to inform about the proposed Association	HP
Investigate sources of sponsorship	JA
Investigate sources of funding	YS
Set date for next meeting (April) Select venue for next meeting	JA JL