

THE DISTRICT SERVICE CABINET INTRODUCTION

The City Charter establishes a District Service Cabinet in each community district, to be composed of agency officials responsible for local service delivery (Sec. 2705-a).

MEMBERSHIP AND COTERMINALITY

The District Manager of the Community Board chairs the District Service Cabinet (DSC), whose

members include representatives of the agencies that deliver local services to the Community District. Services that are subject to coterminality (Charter Section 2704) should be represented on the Cabinet. Coterminality requires that the boundaries of certain agencies' local service districts coincide with the boundaries of the Community Districts. Some services must be coterminous with individual Community Districts, while others may be coterminous with aggregates of Community Districts. The head of each agency subject to coterminality must appoint a local service chief to each service district. The local service chief should have authority over the agency's personnel, programs and facilities within the district. The granting of authority to local service chiefs is a Charter mandate often referred to as management decentralization. In general, the local service chief should be a member of the District Service Cabinet. For some services, however,

this has been unfeasible, either because the local service chief has too many districts to cover or because the agency delivers diverse services that would not be effectively represented by the local service chief. The chart below shows the local service chiefs and District Service Cabinet representatives of the services subject to coterminality. The Mayor's Community Assistance Unit annually publishes a list of the names, titles, and addresses of the local service chiefs of the various agencies.

Agency Local Service Chief Representative to the District Service Cabinet

One-to-one Coterminality:

Department of Parks and Recreation

Principal Parks Supervisor

- Maintenance and Operations Principal Parks Supervisor
- Recreation Borough Recreation Staff

Police Department Precinct

Commander Precinct Commander

Department of Sanitation

District Superintendent, Enforcement Zone Coordinator

Fire Department

Fire Chief

Human Resources Administration

Community Affairs Representative

Aggregate Coterminality

Department of Transportation

- Bureau of Highway Operations

District Supervisor

- Bureau of Traffic Operations

Borough Engineer Borough Engineer or Representative

Department of Environmental Protection

- Sewer Maintenance and Repair

District Supervisor Management Staff/Division Head

Department of Health

Borough Manager District Health Manager

Department of Housing Preservation and Development

Agency Representative

In addition to the agencies which are to be coterminous, the Cabinet includes representatives of other agencies that provide local services on a regular basis in the community district. These agencies include but are not restricted to: the Fire Department, Department for the Aging, Department of Consumer Affairs, and Department of Buildings. Some of these representatives may not need to attend every meeting of the Cabinet, but should be available to the District Manager and the Cabinet when an issue arises relevant to their agencies. Other Cabinet members include Council Members whose districts make up any part of the community district, the chairperson of the Community Board (or a representative), and a representative from the Department of City Planning. The Cabinet also

includes a liaison from the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit (CAU) who can serve as a bridge between the Cabinet and the Mayor's Office. The liaison reports special problems to the Mayor's Office or to agency commissioners for resolution, and serves as a resource person on the provisions of the City Charter relating to Community Boards and District Service Cabinets. One of the functions of the Community Assistance Unit is to transmit and explain new techniques, ideas and solutions developed in one Cabinet to other Cabinets throughout the city.

The Board may wish to invite other agencies to its Cabinet meetings. These invitations will depend upon the needs of the community and priorities set by the local Cabinet. They may include voluntary hospitals and non-profit service providers in the district.

DUTIES OF A DISTRICT SERVICE CABINET

The following are the responsibilities of District Service Cabinets as mandated by the Charter (Sec.2705-b). Actual Charter language is in italics.

- *Coordinate service functions and programs of the agencies that deliver services in the community district.*

The District Service Cabinet is the primary mechanism through which local service delivery issues can be raised, discussed and resolved. If used effectively, the Cabinet can provide the basis for a comprehensive approach to service delivery within the community district. For instance, the Highways District Supervisor, whose service district must be coterminous with one or more community districts, may find it helpful to get the observations of Cabinet members about street conditions as he develops priorities for street repaving. The Department of Sanitation District Superintendent, whose personnel sweep the streets regularly, is a particularly valuable source of information about street conditions. Another example of interagency cooperation is the assistance that the Office of Code Enforcement (HPD) can give to the Health Department in its efforts to locate and control occurrences of lead paint poisoning. Each Cabinet representative comes to the meeting with clearly defined duties already assigned by Department policy and regulations. The Police Department Precinct Commanding Officer has definite sectors that must be patrolled; the Department of Sanitation District Superintendent has sections where refuse collection schedules must be maintained. It takes planning, tact and determination to motivate Cabinet members to participate jointly in additional assignments which require an adjustment of personnel and equipment.

- *Consider interagency problems and impediments to the effective and economic delivery of services in the district.*

Many service delivery issues involve more than one agency. The Cabinet provides the setting for agencies to resolve these problems. For example, at one Cabinet meeting, Police, Traffic, Highways, General Services and Con Edison worked together to remove a street light pole from a dangerous intersection. Some Cabinets have chosen to form task forces to handle specific problems. Such task forces have been most effective when formed on a short-term basis and disbanded when the issue has been resolved.

- *Plan and recommend joint programs to meet the needs and priorities of community districts and their residents.*

In most cases, the Cabinet will implement these programs. Such joint programs might be a health fair or a joint inspection of a building. Cabinet members might recommend to their supervisors that a special concentration of programs and resources, drawn from several agencies, be placed in the district for a season.

When a multi-agency project is placed on the agenda, it is vital that the need for the project, its importance to the community and the value of its completion be clearly and accurately explained by the District Manager. This process assumes that the flow of the project has been from the Board to the Cabinet. However, the Board must also be prepared to accept and support projects and systems initiated by the Cabinet. The Board and the District Service Cabinet must be mutually receptive and supportive. In some cases, the proposed project cannot possibly be handled by the available public and private resources within the community. The Community Board must then consider alternate methods of securing the essential resources. When a multi-agency project is planned, there should be assignment of responsibilities to each agency participating. This must be agreeable to all agencies since the District Manager has no line authority over the Cabinet, and one agency cannot commit the resources of another.

- *Consult with residents of the community district and their representatives about local service problems and activities.*

In most districts, primary community input to individual Cabinet members will be through the District Manager, the Board Chairperson who sits on the Cabinet, or Board committee chairpersons. A productive approach might be to schedule a

particular service chief for meetings with a functioning Community Board committee once or twice a year in addition to meeting at District Consultations during the budget process.

- *Keep a public record of its activities and transactions, including minutes of its meetings.*

While DSC meetings are not subject to the New York State's Open Meetings Law and therefore need not be open to the public, it is a Charter requirement that a public record of the meeting be maintained.

POWERS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE DISTRICT SERVICE CABINET

With the authority granted in the Charter, Cabinet members can work on many community problems and make the necessary decisions to resolve these problems. However, resolution of some problems necessitates going beyond the authority of a Cabinet member. These more involved problems can be presented to the Borough Board by the Community Board Chairperson, or to the Borough Cabinet, or referred directly to the central agency if citywide policy is involved. The District Manager and Community Board must realize that while Cabinet members have some managerial authority, they cannot be expected to take actions or make

commitments which go against their agencies' policies, regulations, or collective bargaining agreements. The Charter specifically authorizes the heads of agencies to assign or reallocate personnel, equipment or other resources outside of a Community District to meet emergency needs, special situations, or temporary conditions. For instance, police officers and Department of Parks and Recreation employees are often shifted to the beaches during the summer to meet special needs there. Also, if certain communities are unusually hard hit by snow, Department of Sanitation workers and plows may be brought in from other districts.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF AGENCIES TO CABINETS

As mentioned earlier, many agencies are mandated by the Charter to appoint responsible personnel to the District Service Cabinet. These members should be able to make decisions regarding scheduling and the allocation of personnel and equipment. They also should have line authority over agency programs, personnel, and facilities within the district. Agencies are also responsible for providing the Cabinet with pertinent information so it can effectively conduct its business. The Cabinet can only deal intelligently with an issue if given all required information by the involved agency or agencies. This sharing of information also helps the

Cabinet understand the problems and limitations faced by the agency representative.

THE CABINET MEETING

Most Cabinets meet monthly on the same weekday and at the same time. Experience has shown that Cabinet meetings work better when held at about 9:00 or 9:30 A.M. This allows most Cabinet members to begin their day with the meeting, and also enables representatives from the Departments of Police and Sanitation to arrive after their staffs begin the morning shift. Cabinet meetings usually last about 1-1/2 hours. District Managers should encourage cooperation between Cabinet members if they are to work effectively together toward resolving local service delivery problems. This makes the method of conducting the meeting extremely important. The expertise and suggestions of each Cabinet member must be respected. The District Manager should make an effort to involve the entire Cabinet in the discussion and resolution of an issue, but should not embarrass any reticent service chief by forcing him or her to participate. A good Cabinet meeting is one in which an agency chief also makes recommendations to improve services in areas outside of his or her field. A Cabinet is most effective when its members think beyond their individual areas of expertise and consider the needs of the entire district. The District Manager, as chairperson of the Cabinet, may decide to invite

representatives of community groups to present specific issues directly to the Cabinet. On such occasions, community representatives can augment the Cabinet's understanding of the nature of a problem or can provide important details of the situation. The District Manager may invite community residents as observers. However, experience with the Cabinets in districts throughout the city indicates that they tend to function most effectively when the public does not participate in the meetings. If Cabinet meetings become a forum for citizens to voice individual complaints about City services, it will be impossible for members to frankly discuss the issues before them. The proper place for handling individual complaints is either in the Community Board office or at public hearings which the Board may call to elicit such community input. District Service Cabinet meetings are not subject to the provisions of the Open Meetings Law. An agenda, prepared and distributed to Cabinet members in advance, is a necessity for a productive meeting. Not only does it help the District Manager maintain the flow of the meeting, but it also gives the representatives an opportunity to come prepared to discuss particular issues. As chairperson of the Cabinet, the District Manager is responsible for preparing the agenda. This works best when done in consultation with the Board Chair, committee chairs and the service chiefs themselves. It is important for all parties to feel comfortable about recommending agenda items. Attendance should be taken at every meeting. This identifies the properly

designated representative and assures the service chief that his or her presence is on record. Minutes are another essential Cabinet element. They should be taken by the Board's staff, then transcribed and duplicated. Since the District Manager is responsible for follow-up on Cabinet discussions and decisions, the minutes should be available to a wide range of community groups and City officials as well as Cabinet and Board members. It is often helpful to have a large map of the district available at the meeting. This enables Cabinet members to pinpoint exact locations where problems exist. Useful maps may be obtained from the Department of City Planning. Experience across the city has demonstrated that the District Service Cabinet process works and represents a unique opportunity for service agencies and the community to join in resolving problems of mutual concern. There are numerous instances where interagency projects have been successfully initiated or completed by the Cabinet structure. These include: (1) transferring Parks property (despite complex legal problems) to Highways, in order to permit the widening of a roadway that was the scene of frequent accidents; (2) gaining the cooperation of the Bureaus of Highways and Traffic, Con Edison, and other private agencies to redesign and construct a traffic island on a street where numerous accidents were occurring; (3) arranging for the Fire Department to flood a Parks mini-pool to create an ice-skating rink for the children of the community; (4) changing sweeping schedules to provide more parking for a community, an action requiring

approval from Sanitation, Traffic, and Police; (5) scheduling “one stop” social service programs so community residents can secure information and assistance for rent problems, Social Security questions, food stamp inquiries and other related services in the same office on the same day. Of course, the actual delivery of services is conducted away from the conference table. The monthly Cabinet meeting supplies the opportunity for the service chiefs, District Manager, and Board Chairperson to share information and plan joint endeavors. It works as well as it does because all participants are committed to delivering services to the district.