

## MINUTES

### MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

01 MARCH 2012

**Present:**

**Councillors:** Flint  
Guest  
Rance  
Taylor  
Wixted

**Officers:** Michelle Anderson Corporate Support Team Leader  
(Democracy)  
Jim Doyle Group Manager, Democratic Services

The meeting began at 7.30pm

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Conway and Hearn.

#### 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2011 were agreed by the members present.

#### 3. EVALUATION FEEDBACK

The item was introduced by M Anderson who began with the success of the Environmental Management briefing, held prior to council on 11 January 2012. This was a successful event and there was a good attendance. In addition it had highlighted a common weakness regarding provision of slides/handouts prior to the training session. It was suggested that an effort be made to provide these prior to each event.

Councillor Taylor pointed out that sometimes the facilitator did not always collect the evaluation forms to return to Member Support. He suggested a 'Tips for facilitators' paper giving instructions; including advice on collecting assessment forms. Councillor Rance suggested putting a tray in the training venue in which to deposit the forms at the end of the session.

Councillor Guest then moved on to issues arising from the timing of Member Development Sessions, particularly the difficulties posed for those members who were employed, getting to early evening development sessions. Councillor Taylor pointed out that there had been requests from some members that training be held prior to evening meetings. This way it would not always add an additional evening to their schedule. To address this it was proposed that we continued to consider the various alternatives for delivery of training, including different start times.

Councillor Guest next raised the matter of making clear the course content and the desired outcomes, in order to manage member expectations. As an example she gave Member training with the Gazette reporter, where members expected a session on how to act with reporters, not a session by a reporter on what they expected from Members. She stressed that we should ensure that members understood what the session was expected to deliver.

The group then considered the training held on 22 February 2012 on 'Managing Self Financing debt'. There was a good deal of positive feedback on this session; once again attention was drawn to the need to make the background training materials available in as many formats as possible, prior to the session.

Cllr Rance felt the session would have benefited from a discussion on rents issues and the increases in line with what government dictates as part of the DBC Business Plan. Councillor Taylor led a short discussion on new rents regimes and different models for dealing with the 30 year debt.

The group agreed that it would be beneficial for this training to be rolled out to the Tenants and Leaseholders group and a further session for the Housing and Community OSC.

Councillor Flint noted that she and Councillor White had attended a training session on 'Self Financing' with the Corporate Director of Finance & Governance. She also noted that she had met with the Assistant Director of Housing Landlord and the Corporate Director of Finance & Governance to look at the Business Plan.

### **Outcomes**

1. That presenters/facilitators be encouraged to provide slides/handouts a couple of days before the event.
2. That a tray be provided to facilitators to collect the completed evaluation forms at the end of each training session.
3. Roll out Managing Self financing Debt presentation to the Tenants and Leaseholders group and a further session for the Housing and Community OSC.

### **4. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

M Anderson advised that there were to be four pre-council sessions which were yet to be populated with subject areas. She explained that the Standards training may have to be an extra session, arranged at short notice. S Baker would advise on this. Localism training was also being arranged and hoped it could be joint training with other authorities in Hertfordshire. A large session would be planned for Scrutiny. The aim was to make this an important event which would involve co-ordination with the O&S Chairs/Vice-Chairs group and other authorities.

M Anderson noted that specific topic areas would be included in the Scrutiny training. The OSC Chairs/Vice Chairs group had already been asked for suggestions, which included Public Speaking, Questioning Techniques, Leadership, Debating and Challenging techniques. The group were asked for any additional areas.

Councillor Flint suggested training around keeping an Audit trail of reports at OSC meetings and when they should be followed up and reported back to the committee.

J Doyle added that the Corporate Director for Performance, Improvement and Transformation, had supplied details of an external training provider for OSC who would combine it with an Audit Review of O&S. The MDSG fully supported this suggestion. Details would be passed onto the group once officers had considered this option in more detail.

The group discussed the Emergency Planning session in April 2012, to be led by Jenny Young, Emergency Plan Officer and suggested that in future it would be helpful to include full officer job titles in the new programme.

### **Outcome**

1. Job titles of the trainers/facilitators of future development sessions to be added to the Member Development Programme, and to note if they were Internal/External.
2. Details of External providers for O&S training would be sent to the group after Officer consideration.

## **5. QUARTERLY BUDGET UPDATE**

M Anderson detailed the various items in the budget, which had been almost completely utilised. There was still £4,000 outstanding committed to D Lamb for the Personal Development Plan work he was carrying out, after which only around £200 would remain. M Anderson felt this had been achieved with the help of regular monitoring at the MDSG meetings.

Particularly pleasing had been the contribution to the budget of around £2,000 income from outside participants on courses organised by DBC. This was a great achievement and we hoped to match this next year.

It was requested that '£' signs be added into the budget spreadsheet.

### **Outcome**

The MDSG noted that the Budget for 2011/12 was on target.

## **6. VOLUME OF EMAILS SURVEY RESULTS**

M Anderson reported that there had been 31 responses to the survey circulated at the previous Full Council meeting. This was a great achievement as many members took the survey away and returned at a later date. The general consensus was that everyone was content to continue to receive training and Member Development information by e-mail.

It was suggested and the merits debated, that Adverts for Member Development events be placed as a hard copy in Member pigeon-holes to re-enforce attendance.

Councillor Guest accepted much of what was said and suggested we attempted to pursue the use of electronic communication as the primary accepted means of communication, backed up by as many other means as felt practical.

### **Outcome**

1. That hard copy flier's, promoting future Member Development events are placed in Member pigeon-holes to encourage attendance.

## **7. PDP/360 DEGREE FEEDBACK UPDATE**

The group considered progress in producing Personal Development Plans with each member which was currently underway.

M Anderson updated the group on progress with the 360° feedback trial. Originally 10 people were selected; of these only two continued with the scheme, therefore four alternative Councillors were selected and added. In addition, there were some initial technical difficulties with the software but these have been resolved.

With regards to the PDPs, currently only 50% of the initial forms had been returned. This was less than the response at this point last time. Councillors were urged to return the forms, and if they did not want to take part in the process, to state this on the form. MDSG members were asked to encourage their colleagues to return the form and if they required a new one, to contact D Lamb or Member Support. D Lamb was to start scheduling interviews in the next week, with a view to completing them by April. The intention was to produce a summary report back to this group by June.

Councillor Guest enquired if she would be notified when her contributors had all responded to her 360 degree feedback questionnaire. M Anderson informed her that she would be able to access her final report, once at least three people had responded. It was noted that staff in Member Support did not have access to any information provided.

### **Outcome**

That the results of the PDP programme be reported back to this group at its June meeting.

## **8. DRAFT MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

A Member Development Strategy had been produced as part of attaining the Member Development Charter in 2010. This strategy ends in 2012 so it was time to produce a new one as part of Member Charter Plus. Work had commenced on the parts of the strategy which could be carried out by officers but the MDSG comments were sought, prior to when the document goes to Finance and Resources OSC in June, for consideration of Cabinet in July and then adoption by Council in September. M Anderson had met with the Leader of the council and had added a few sections into the document, since it had been circulated to the MDSG. M Anderson highlighted the additional sections in the revised Strategy.

Councillor Taylor pointed out that this strategy had been generated much easier this time as they had a precedent to follow and was a tremendous document.

Councillor Rance returned to the Training Budget, and the monitoring of personal training. She was concerned that identifying who had undertaken certain training could lead to councillors being cautious about what training they request to go on in case they revealed a perceived weakness. She suggested not identifying the councillor doing the training. Councillor Wixted suggested that records should avoid identifying personalities doing particular subjects but instead should identify the course and the number of people who attended, not the person.

## Outcome

That course records identify the course being undertaken and the number taking up the opportunity without identifying the councillors involved.

### **9. CHARTER PLUS ACTION PLAN**

M Anderson advised the group that it was intended to request commitment to the Member Charter Plus by Full Council in July 2012. As stated earlier, officers had already commenced their elements of the Action plan.

M Anderson highlighted various sections of the plan that would require the input of this group and the Councillors in general:

- Page 5, 1.3 – *‘Statistical Evidence of Cultural & Personal circumstances’*. This was difficult to produce evidence.

Councillor Taylor noted that work with Community Action Dacorum (CAD) could be incorporated, who recently achieved *‘Investors in Diversity’*.

Members were asked for suggestions to be included in the next Member Development Newsletter. They suggested:

- Performance Indicator achieved.
  - Anonymous initiative – Names not publicised when attended courses
  - Work of the steering group
  - Quote from the MDSG Chairman
- Page 7, 2.2 – *‘Councillor Roles and evidence to support partnership work’*.

Members suggested that S Collins is contacted as well as D Gill.

Councillor M Flint suggested contacting the Federation of community centres.

- Page 9, 2.5 – *‘Explicit all Committee Learning & Development plans that feed into Corporate Plan’*

Councillor Wixted suggested recording the sessions so Councillors could watch them from home. Producing CDs and placing on the website was also suggested, encouraging e-learning.

- Page 10, 2.6 – *‘Development opportunities are promoted and take into account access requirements.’* A mini questionnaire would be sent to those who had not attended any/minimal training in the past year, in an attempt to identify any issues.
- Page 12, 2.9 – *‘Structured Induction process for all councillors.’* The *‘Becoming a Councillor’* webpage would be updated.

Work for this criteria would also entail Pre-election briefings for candidates to be provided by the Group Manager – Democratic Services.

- Page 15, 3.1 – *‘Councillors learn & develop effectively’*.

Councillor Wixted felt that it would be good to publicise good feedback of training successes and how Councillors have benefited from it. This may encourage attendance at a future event.

- Page 21, 4.4 – *‘Councillors are a source of knowledge and share their perspectives and learning’.*

Councillor Guest felt that this could be done through Political groups. She felt her colleagues would act in a ‘disseminating’ role ensuring that knowledge was shared throughout the group. There would be a difficulty in providing the evidence that advocacy training, formed part of the Political Group meetings. There was then a discussion on how the other political groups trained their members and shared their expertise.

Councillors Rance and Flint agreed to consult their groups on how the training was benefiting them. Councillor Rance felt that evidence of training could be found in the form of development which was undertaken as part of their community role; participating in political groups, training from their parties and LGA courses.

M Anderson said she would email a list of issues within the Charter Plus Action Plan, which required further input and consideration by the group.

Councillor Rance requested that an ‘Acronym Glossary’ be included in all committee reports to help Members. The MDSG supported this request.

### **Outcome**

1. That the various areas identified as possible sources of alternative and diverse means of training be further investigated with a view to inclusion in the Action plan.
2. Member Support to investigate the possibility of including an acronym glossary in every Committee report.

### **10. MDSG WORK PROGRAMME**

M Anderson brought members attention to the current Work Programme and explained that it would be populated by the Member Chart Plus Action Plan.

### **11. NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on 13 June 2012 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm