

MINUTES

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

19 MARCH 2013

Present:

Councillors: Conway
Hearn
Rance
Taylor

Officers: Michelle Anderson Corporate Support Team Leader
(Democracy)

The meeting began at 7.30pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Flint and Wixted were absent.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 05 September were agreed by the members present.

3. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2013/14

M Anderson noted that the programme needed to be populated. The one hour briefings prior to Full Council would be reserved for Officer requests. This would then leave the two hour sessions for Member requests.

M Anderson explained that a joint authority session would be hosted by Dacorum on 10 October 2013 for Public Speaking. The group agreed that this would be a good idea and a way of strengthening the joint authority working.

Councillor Taylor suggested that a session is held on the Constitution, based on comments received by fellow councillors. He felt that a general understanding of certain topics was required. The evening should be an opportunity for members to learn rather than members suggesting amendments.

Councillor Rance agreed that this would be a good idea as a greater understanding of the constitution would benefit many councillors.

Outcome

- M Anderson would meet with Mark Brookes to discuss which key areas could be incorporated into the training session. The MDSG would be informed of the meeting date and attend if available.
- The date for this development session would be confirmed.

4. EVALUATION FEEDBACK

Members discussed each evaluation feedback summary and noted that David McGrath was an excellent trainer and it was good to note his return in May.

Councillor Taylor felt that the Information Security course was crucial for all members.

M Anderson highlighted that a comment had been received suggesting that the course be an annual event and/or included in Members induction.

The Group agreed that both of these suggestions were good ideas.

Councillor Rance felt that some members may need further IT training in the future. Councillor Taylor suggested that they contact John Worts.

Councillor Rance noted that a great comment received from the Scrutiny training, was that someone benefited more from the old committee system. She agreed with this comment and felt that members had more say and more involvement when the council had the old committee system.

Councillor Taylor said that Member Development was very important, and agreed that perhaps currently members felt that they had very little influence on decisions.

Councillor Rance suggested that maybe more councillors would have attended the scrutiny course if they could see a point in it. She suggested that maybe a survey be sent to all councillors asking for feedback on Scrutiny.

M Anderson said that this had already been done, just prior to the scrutiny review starting, however only one form was received.

Councillor Rance said that this spoke volumes.

Councillor Hearn said the difference with scrutiny was that people needed to be enthusiastic and know they were making a difference. She gave the example that members on the Housing Appeals committee were hands on and dedicated as it affected people's lives.

Councillor Taylor said that the feedback should be sent to Nigel Smith, but explain that the MDSG felt the scoring system was perhaps a little churlish. Some of the points made in the feedback were true however they felt he had a very well researched knowledge base.

M Anderson asked for the group's thoughts on holding an Overview & Scrutiny feedback workshop for all members. This would give them the opportunity to develop the suggestions/improvements from the review and help take scrutiny forward.

Councillor Taylor supported this idea as it would make councillors feel involved and give them the opportunity to have a say.

Councillor Rance also supported this and said the members could be asked if they felt there was a different way of doing O&S, for example having just one committee or more working groups.

Outcome

- That the Information Security course be included in the annual training programme and included in the Members Induction Programme.
- An Overview & Scrutiny development evening to be organised.

5. ADVERTISING & TELLING US YOU'RE COMING

M Anderson explained that Officers were finding it difficult to obtain replies from members, as to whether or not they were able to attend training sessions. For each session, emails were sent, a note was included in Members News, flyers were put into pigeon holes, it was announced at committee meetings leading up to the event and reply slips were sometimes left on members seats at meetings. However very few councillors' replied and this made it difficult to plan the event. On occasions events had been cancelled, however more members may well have attended than officers were aware of.

Members were asked if they had any preference to advertising training sessions or alternative suggestions.

Councillor Hearn felt this should be taken up within group.

Councillor Rance said that some courses had been done before and therefore members who had been here for a while had already been on them.

Councillor Taylor felt that the brightly coloured flyer in pigeon holes worked well.

Outcome

- Member Development sessions would be advertised in Members News and on brightly coloured A5 flyers in each pigeon hole.

6. QUARTERLY BUDGET UPDATE

M Anderson explained that the budget shown in the agenda was as at 4 March 2013. The year-end report would be present at the next meeting, along with the current situation at that time.

It was noted that the year-end would potentially see a £1500 underspend. M Anderson said that this was good budget monitoring, considering the budget had been reduced to £11,000 when it was not an election year. Lots had been achieved within this budget.

Councillor Taylor suggested that the spread sheet formulas are checked as they may not be correct.

M Anderson would check this.

Outcome

- The spread sheet formulas would be checked to ensure they were correct.

7. CHARTER RE-ASSESSMENT

M Anderson explained that the Charter re-assessment was due December 2013. It was up to the councillors to give their views as to whether or not the council goes ahead with it.

M Anderson said that if the council went for the charter status again it would cost £2250. The process would be the same as before in that, we would do a self-assessment, an evidence folder would be required and the full assessment day involving interviews with officers and members.

If the council chose not to go for the status, nothing would change. The MDSG would continue, as would all of the processes already in place. The council would however lose the Charter Status, but could choose to sign up at any time. So if they felt things had slipped and Member Development needed a push, this could be a tool to help with that.

M Anderson added that officers found the Hertfordshire Member Development Network group of great benefit and found it was a way of joint working and sharing ideas. The group had been recognised by the Charter group.

The group were asked for their thoughts and M Anderson noted that they could talk to their colleagues and perhaps decide at the next MDSG meeting in June.

Councillor Conway felt that all of the work had been completed already and therefore doing it again would be of no great benefit.

Councillor Rance agreed and suggested that the money would be better spent on something else.

Councillor Taylor felt that Member Development should continue as it was and to try and develop it further. The council could not afford to lose member development.

Outcome

- The MDSG felt that the council should not apply for the re-assessment for Member Charter status. However Member Development should continue in its current form.

8. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY REVIEW FEEDBACK

M Anderson explained that Nigel Smith had carried out the Overview & Scrutiny review. He had looked at key documents, attended OSC meetings, held workshops with Officers and Members and provided training. A draft report had now been received and this would form the council's improvement plan. Any training issues would be discussed at the MDSG meeting in June.

Councillor Taylor suggested that Nigel Smith attends that meeting to feedback on the review.

Outcome

- Nigel Smith would be invited to attend the MDSG meeting in June 2013.

9. MDSG WORK PROGRAMME

- Overview and Scrutiny feedback/improvement plan would be considered at the MDSG meeting in June 2013.

M Anderson asked that members give their suggestions to Officers for the future programme.

M Anderson reported back on the recent Herts Network meeting and highlighted areas which Dacorum may wish to consider:

- Visits to areas of interest on the Borough
- Peer IT clinic prior to Full Council
- E Learning – advertise and guide to topics of interest, to focus the offering

Members were happy to encourage these suggestions.

Possible visits included: Adventure Playgrounds, Cupid Green, Hightown Praetorian, British Film Institute.

Councillor Rance suggested conservation/environmental site visits, with specialist guides. For example showing to members how modern day living affects reality.

Outcome

- Officers would look into the suggestions made above.

10. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 18 June 2013 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 8.59pm