

MINUTES

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

20 JUNE 2013

Present:

Councillors: Conway
Hearn
Taylor
Wixted

Officers: Lucy Stone Member Support Officer
Michelle Anderson Corporate Support Team Leader
(Democracy)
Clare Thorley Member Support Officer

Others: Nigel Smith OSC Review author

The meeting began at 7.30pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Flint and Rance.

Councillor Taylor apologised for the late change of date for this meeting and thanked everyone present for attending.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2013 were agreed by the members present.

3. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY REVIEW FEEDBACK

M Anderson said that the full report and recommendations would be discussed at the next meeting of the OSC Chairs/Vice Chairs group. They would look at an improvement plan as a whole. The MDSG were asked to consider the training and development recommendations. M Anderson introduced Nigel Smith, who had carried out the OSC review and asked him to talk through the recommendations.

N Smith said the training and development opportunities were somewhat dependent on what direction the Council chose to take following the review. He went through the recommendations:

- *Develop chairing skills to close down issues and questions, bring in others and ensure focus on key issues.*

This would help keep the meetings on the right track. Firstly, overall chairing skills would help in ensuring everyone contributed to the meeting. Secondly, it would make sure everyone was well prepared to get the most out of the session, for example, tabling questions before the meeting in order to get the fullest response at the

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meeting. The Chair would also be able to ensure that the OSC meetings are used for the right purpose and not for questions on ward issues or requests for information.

- *Train and develop members in new methodologies, techniques and approaches to scrutiny.*

This would cover critical questioning techniques, rather than asking for information, probing deeper. One technique was to ask 'why' three times when an answer was given, as that initial answer may not fully address the point. N Smith said that some of the feedback he received was that some of the most rewarding times had been where a meeting only had one topic to cover.

- *Ensure effective induction for scrutiny members – for example, spread over a number of months including specific modules. Shadowing and mentoring could form part of this.*

OSC was a critical element in governance and democracy. Given the political structure of the Council, it was noted that it could be difficult to challenge your own administration. It was important, however, to recognise that OSC could still play a role, for example, policy development of value for money issues. Members could be given an introduction to service areas as well as general OSC matters. It was important that members had an understanding of the service they were scrutinising as well as the issues faced by that service.

- *Utilise scrutiny as a means of member development and succession planning for Executive positions.*

OSC was a good succession into Cabinet, especially if OSC was used to make significant contributions into policy and performance.

N Smith said another helpful tool was shadowing or peer review. A member from one OSC could attend another OSC meeting to observe and then discuss the meeting with the Chairman/members afterwards.

Councillor Taylor said that within the Council's constitution, Cabinet were the policy makers. The Cabinet members met with the senior officers to discuss policy and a lot of what came to Cabinet and then to OSC was therefore officer led. On the Audit Committee, there was a member who drilled down on the details, but that member was effectively questioning an officer led policy. The members were not professionals in those fields, the officers were experts. He added that it was interesting that members were challenging what officers were giving them rather than what they thought was important. Councillor Taylor said that the Leader of the Council had stated that he would not consider succession planning.

Councillor Hearn agreed with Councillor Taylor and said that the constitution would need changing. N Smith said that it could sometimes be difficult for members to have the confidence to scrutinise officers because they were the experts.

Councillor Hearn said that some OSCs were run very well and differently to others. She said that shadowing was a very good idea. Councillor Wixted agreed and said that it was easier for a member to get their point across at some meetings.

Councillor Hearn said that the Housing OSC agendas in particular could be very long. M Anderson said that there were up to 10 items and asked if they were all scrutinised fully. Councillor Hearn said that some members had a lot to say and were determined to say it all.

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L Stone suggested the possibility of adding a rules of debate for OSC meetings in order to try and stop members talking for a long time about issues not so relevant. N Smith said that he had seen members asking up to four questions at once, where the point was often missed. He asked if all the papers were necessary. Councillor Conway said the papers were always in enormous depth. Councillor Taylor said that OSC meetings were for questions, but said that there was a need to get through all the papers. He said that there was also a tendency for members to ask questions which had already been asked.

Councillor Taylor asked how more member input could be achieved. N Smith said that policy was set by Cabinet and informed by officers. Getting in earlier on that process was one way, topics could be linked to the Council's forward plan rather than only challenging after the event which had limited impact. OSCs could set work programmes more along policy development lines. They could also focus more on the bigger issues which would make the most difference.

M Anderson suggested that training could also be useful for officers as well as members. N Smith agreed and said that it was more difficult to write a succinct report and spoke of the importance of writing in plain English.

Councillor Taylor thanked N Smith for attending the meeting and said there were a lot of ideas to be considered.

4. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2013/14

M Anderson went through the Member Development programme and highlighted what had been carried out so far. She said that the Planning update coming up soon had attracted a lot of interest from Town and Parish Councillors: A second evening might be needed for this topic. A briefing session would be held on Dacorum Anywhere, which Councillor Rance had expressed the importance of. Public Speaking in November would be a joint authority event. Following the previous MDSG meeting, Constitution training had been scheduled, this would be run by M Brookes and J Doyle and M Anderson said she would run the content past Councillor Taylor beforehand. Information Security had been added as it had been agreed that this would be an annual session.

Councillors Hearn and Taylor said that they had spoken to C Lynch who was thinking of holding a session with members and representatives from senior schools. This was likely to be in November and a letter would be sent out to senior schools shortly. Some representatives from the Youth Council would be invited to the Mayor's parlour with a group of Councillors. Councillor Taylor said that he suggested that some of the Member Development budget could be used for these events.

5. EVALUATION FEEDBACK

Councillor Taylor said that at the start of the Charing Skills session, the trainer had asked what areas members would like to cover. The trainer then included everything that had been requested. Councillor Taylor said he was then surprised by the comments saying the training content was not relevant. He also commented on the three forms not handed in at the meeting.

M Anderson asked if a follow up session on this would be necessary. Councillor Taylor said it could be, but that other things may be needed first.

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6. QUARTERLY BUDGET UPDATE

M Anderson presented the final budget for 2012/13. Some money had been held back to potentially recommit to Member Charter which had not been needed. She then highlighted the 2013/14 budget so far which was on track.

7. ANNUAL TRAINING REPORT

Councillor Taylor thanked the officers for the concise report. M Anderson said that report had been to CMT and highlighted that she had now informed South East Employers that the Council would not be recommitting to Member Charter. She said this status would expire in December, but that the standards and processes in place would remain the same.

M Anderson said that the target of every member attending an average of three sessions had been exceeded, therefore the interest in member development was not dwindling. She said that the Herts Member Development Network continued to be very useful and was a great source of shared knowledge. Future plans included the next round of PDPs and more site visits. CMT had been very pleased with member development.

8. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 2014

M Anderson said the next PDP sessions were due to be held in early 2014. She said there were three options:

1. Ask Derek Lamb to carry them out again
2. Look into different external providers for this service
3. Carry the PDPs out internally by the Organisational Development officer.

M Anderson said that the third option was preferred by CMT.

Councillor Hearn questioned the confidentiality of an officer carrying them out. M Anderson said they would only be seen by the officer holding the PDP and Member Support officers responsible for Member Development. M Anderson added that expectations would have to be set for them to be carried out in house as had been set out with Derek Lamb in the past.

Councillor Taylor expressed some concern for them being carried out internally and questioned whether Councillors had felt more comfortable with Derek Lamb as he was independent. M Anderson said there was a cost to employing someone externally whereas internal officers already had capacity which would be a saving to the budget.

Members discussed this and concluded that they would raise it at the next Group meeting. They asked officers to get the opinions of other members. It would then be brought to the next meeting for a final decision.

Outcome

Councillors to add PDPs to the next group meeting agenda. Officers to ask opposition members for their opinions. The topic to be brought back to the next meeting.

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9. MDSG WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was agreed.

M Anderson said that if anyone had anything to add to the work programme between meetings, to let her know.

10. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 1 October 2013 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm

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