

MINUTES

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

04 MARCH 2015

Present:

Councillors: Adshead, Douris, Rance
and Taylor (Chairman)

Officers: Trina Lawson Corporate Support Team Leader
(Democracy)
Trudi Coston Member Support Officer

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Conway, Flint, Hearn and G Sutton.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2014 were agreed by the Members present and then signed by the Chairman.

3. EVALUATION FEEDBACK

T Coston advised that numbers continued to drop and whilst this is disappointing, it was to be expected.

The Chairman commented that it was interesting that there had only been 5 attendees at the last few development sessions but that the overall feeling had been quite positive. He further advised that the previously cancelled Information and Data Security session that had originally been scheduled for 25th February 2015, had been re-booked for 10 March 2015 at 7pm, and asked colleagues to drum up as much support as possible. He went on to say that he had pushed for the rescheduling as the Information Commissioner had advised that this training needed to be done. He further added that he had spoken with John Worts and agreed that as well as delivering the training, John would provide 51 information packs for all Councillors, and that the training would be delivered again in July, following the election.

Councillor Douris commented that we had previously been accredited for our training and asked if that was still valid. The Chairman advised that the accreditation ran for 3 years and at the time of receiving it we were advised that we were close to achieving the Advanced Accreditation level and that we could look at that at the end of the 3 years. However when that time came and we looked at it, it was felt that the amount of paperwork required was disproportionate to the accreditation, so decided not to proceed but to continue to abide by the foundations of the accreditation.

Chairman

Councillor Douris went on to ask how important it was the Members attend training. T Coston advised that we cannot force people to attend training sessions and respect the fact that not every training session would be relevant or useful to every Councillor, however it was disheartening when specific training sessions are organised as a direct result of feedback from Members and then turn out is low. The Chairman advised that training is a crucial and integral part of any job and that Councillors in particular are an eclectic mix of people with and eclectic mix of skills. He went on to add that he felt quite strongly with regards to training and personal development and that this is what he had hoped the Member Development Steering Group would achieve when it began 7 years ago. He had hoped that the addition of more seasoned Councillors would have added more gravitas. Councillor Rance agreed that not every course was relevant to every Councillor, but noted that the new councillors would be very keen and it will be a busy time so she suggested it would be good if training dates were available as meeting dates are so that Councillors can plan their training schedules as other commitments also need to be taken into account. T Coston advised that the dates are listed on the Committee Timetable but not necessarily with the scheduled training listed.

Councillor Douris went on to say that the reason he had asked about the importance of training was out of frustration. The Officer time and costs involved and to then see only 5 attendees was disappointing. He went on to suggest whether a further column be added to the signing sheet for apologies. Councillor Rance advised that training is not actually a requirement and how would it feel if a Member was named and shamed in this way. She went on to say that some of the best training sessions she had attended had been Officer led and felt that in-house training of this type should be used more often. T Coston added that her concerns with listing names is that it wouldn't necessarily highlight who cannot be bothered, as much as who was unable to attend.

The Chairman suggested that maybe this is something that could be looked at next term.

Councillor Adshead suggested that there should be a certain amount of mandatory training courses that Members should undertake.

Councillor Rance agreed and asked if there was scope to send letters to all candidates, once nominations have been received and advise them when the first training sessions will be. T Coston confirmed that we would be doing that this year and advising of the Induction dates and the training dates.

4. EXIT INTERVIEWS

T Coston shared the previously used Exit Interviews that had been used and asked if Members had any amendments or additions that they would like to make.

Councillor Adshead asked why there was not a questionnaire for those re-elected. The Chairman advised that that information would be captured in the Personal Development Plans.

Councillor Rance referred to Question 4 and suggested that the addition of 'information' to make the question – *Were you provided with the necessary equipment and information to carry out your duties?*

Chairman

Councillor Douris asked if Question 1 was appropriate as it could be a little insensitive

T Coston asked if placing it further down the questionnaire would be a better option rather than making it the first question. Councillor Douris agreed that would be more appropriate.

Councillor Douris also commented that neither questionnaire asks about sharing information with successors. Councillor Rance suggested that this may not be appropriate.

5. 2015 INDUCTION AND PDP PROCESS

T Lawson advised that since the last meeting we had been investigating the option of completing PDP's with external companies. She explained that one of the companies were unable to assist due to high demand but had passed on some questions and information relating to peer mentoring and buddying. She said it was something that needed to be discussed with the Chief Executive first but she wanted to gauge the member's opinions on it before taking it any further. She explained that an initial self-assessment questionnaire would need to be completed by members to make us aware of their areas of interest and then we could approach the appropriate officers to buddy up with them. She noted that there would be a significant cost saving to the council by using this option and asked for member's thoughts on the matter.

Councillor Douris said he felt buddying was a good idea and has done it before. He queried whether it would be done as a council or in a political group. Councillor Rance said the political make up at the council had changed so much since she became a councillor and felt at this stage with being a small group that they wouldn't have the capacity to mentor others. She felt that using experienced officers would be the best option. Councillor Douris agreed.

The Chairman said there was a political side and processing side to being a councillor, and the processing side should be about the progression and learning for all councillors regardless of their political party. He added that he was extremely passionate about training as a whole.

Councillor Adshead said he liked the idea of having officer to help them as there is often a theory that people at the top, i.e. councillors, are often told they don't know other peoples jobs. He felt it would also help build a personal relationship between officers and members.

Councillor Rance felt the plans should be put in place prior to the Election so that the officers are trained and prepared.

Councillor Douris said that County used this method with new members and felt it worked well.

Councillor Rance said it should only be required for roughly three months after the Election.

T Lawson said she would now explore the matter further and take in to account the members comments.

Councillor Adshead commented that with regards to the proposed Induction days, some of the presentations appear to be quite short and suggested that they may overrun and people may not get an opportunity to ask questions and yet there is almost a 2 hour long lunch break. T Coston advised that the lunch break had been increased as it was not felt that there would be sufficient time within an hour for members to have their lunch and also access the service market and speak to Officers. The Chairman further added that there had been consideration given to the length of the presentations as there is a limit as to how much information people can absorb. He went on to say that they needed to be made aware of where they can go to source information, but as this is new information to new Councillors they will remember more if you tell them less.

Councillor Douris asked if a coach tour of the Borough was necessary. T Lawson advised that as Dacorum was currently undergoing regeneration across the Borough, it was felt it was important that Councillors were aware of these projects which may not necessarily be in their Ward and also if they are discussed within committees that they join, they have some understanding of what is being discussed.

6. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 4 June 2015.

The meeting finished at 20.30 pm.