

MINUTES

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

1 OCTOBER 2015

Present:

Councillors: G Adshead, Banks, Conway,
Douris, P Hearn, Hicks,
Howard and Taylor
(Chairman)

Officers: Michelle Anderson Corporate Support Team Leader
(Democracy)
Trudi Coston Member Support Officer

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2015 were agreed by the Members present and then signed by the Chairman.

3. ANNUAL TRAINING REPORT

M Anderson advised that members didn't achieve their training target for 2014/15 however that was expected in the final year of their term and she felt positive that we would achieve this year's target. She said we kept within the £8k training budget for 14/15 and made some significant savings. This year the budget has increased to £11k to incorporate the cost of PDP's and essential training for new and existing members. She explained that we were still part of the Herts Member Development Network group and the next meeting was scheduled for 22 October which DBC were hosting. She invited the Chairman to the meeting, which he accepted but advised he may be late.

Councillor Adshead asked how much of a saving was made from the £8k budget. M Anderson said she didn't have the figures to hand but she would let him know.

Councillor Taylor explained that at a recent Conservative group meeting he was asking members to let him and Councillor Harden know of any problems with the iPads so they can feed them back to Gary Osler in the I.T. department and he can provide them with further training. Councillor Taylor highlighted that the support he had received from Member Support, in particular Catriona and Trudi, had been exceptional.

Councillor Hicks said the problems seemed to be with Good rather than the iPad.

Councillor Adshead agreed with Councillor Hicks as he couldn't access Good Share and added that there were limits to the iPads and he finds the software frustrating.

M Anderson said the introduction of iPads had been discussed for several years and it was a huge step to take. She said members were doing really well and although there are a few people that aren't keen most are embracing it. She advised that Member Support had booked a two hour slot every Tuesday morning from 10am-12pm for members to come in the office and ask any questions they may have and receive additional support. She encouraged members to share their knowledge with each other if they're confident in using the iPad.

Councillor Hicks said if all the software was up and running properly in the first instance then less people would have had issues.

M Anderson advised that we were all still learning and we will continue to have teething problems but once we know about each issue we can resolve it.

Councillor Conway said she loved her iPad apart from not being able to see when capital letters are on or off.

Councillor P Hearn said she found spreadsheets difficult to read on the iPad. M Anderson advised that was something they were looking at before the budget time approaches.

Councillor Taylor said he finds life easier with the iPad and too much paper was wasted in the printing of each agenda.

Councillor Adshead asked if they could have meeting dates entered in to their Good calendar. M Anderson said that was part of the next stage they were looking in to.

Councillor Hicks asked if he was able to change the colours of his calendar entries. M Anderson said she would have to investigate and come back to him.

Councillor Hicks asked if he was able to search for a particular word within a document. M Anderson said she would come back to him on that matter.

Members were advised not to accept the software updates on the iPads.

Actions:

- Member support to advise the amount of underspend for last year's training budget.
- Members to advise Councillors Taylor and Harden of any issues with their iPads so they can feedback to I.T.
- Member support to investigate if it is possible to change the colour of calendar entries.
- Member support to investigate if it is possible to search for a word within a document on the iPad.

4. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2015-2018

M Anderson explained that in 2010 they signed up to Member Charter and one aspect of it is to have a strategy. This was reviewed half way through the term but now needed updating. She said it incorporated the new aims and visions of the future

and the document was available for anyone to view if they had any queries on the matter.

Councillor Taylor said they had reached above standard with Member Charter and the adjudicators were very impressed. He explained that they didn't feel Charter Plus was beneficial as it was much more work for a third of the information and it was very costly so they stuck with Member Charter.

Councillor P Hearn asked if Town and Parish councillors were invited to our training sessions. M Anderson advised that they were invited if it was relevant and beneficial to their role.

Councillor P Hearn felt new members would benefit from a training session with the Clean, Safe and Green team. T Coston advised this was something they were hoping to arrange.

M Anderson explained that there was a section on the council's website called 'how to become a councillor' and it included quotes from three councillors, two of which are no longer councillors. She asked if there was anyone present that would like to volunteer to be part of that webpage or if members would prefer it to be opened up to all councillors. Following a brief discussion members' decided they would prefer all members were invited to take part.

Actions:

- Member support to send an email to all members asking for volunteers to help with the 'how to become a councillor' webpage.

5. MEMBERS TRAINING FEEDBACK

T Coston said that the second induction event went really well and the majority of feedback was positive. She explained that the priority had been to focus on the essential training courses such as licensing, development control and appeals, which most members had attended, and then concentrate on important subjects like data protection, housing and finance. She said the number of attendees is increasing slowly but was still quite low and could be improved.

Councillor Taylor asked the group to encourage members to complete the feedback forms at training sessions.

T Coston advised that the feedback forms were summarised and sent on to the trainers so they were important and useful to more people than just Member Support.

Councillor Adshead queried if text messages were being sent to members to remind them of upcoming training courses. T Coston advised they were being sent. G Adshead said he hadn't received any. T Coston said Member Support had circulated an email in July asking members to opt-in to the text message service but she agreed to re-send it.

Councillor Hicks said the CIL training was very interesting but he felt it would have been useful to have examples of an actual development and where the money goes to put it all in to context. Councillor Howard echoed Councillor Hicks' view. T Coston said this would be fed back to the trainer before another session is booked for next year.

Councillor P Hearn referred to the licensing training and said that Ross Hill was an excellent presenter.

Councillor Taylor referred to the information security/data protection course and noted that although there is nothing in the constitution that says members can't use Facebook, they are advised not to as some of the content can lead to difficult situations.

Actions:

- Member support to send another email to all councillors asking them to opt-in to text message reminders for member development sessions.

6. QUARTERLY BUDGET UPDATE

M Anderson advised that half of the budget for this financial year had been spent which was detailed in the report and the majority of what's remaining would be used for PDP's next year. She said the remaining courses scheduled for 2015/16 were all internal and therefore wouldn't be at a cost. She advised councillors to let Member Support know if there are any courses they would like to go on and we can arrange it for them.

Councillor Taylor asked what the annual conference was that one member had attended. M Anderson said she would look in to it and let him know.

Councillor Hicks said he attended the 'being an effective councillor' and noted that it would have been cheaper if we had a membership with the LGIU. T Coston advised that she believed the membership fee was more than the cost of the training and members didn't attend enough of the LGIU's courses to make the membership fee worthwhile.

Councillor P Hearn felt that the housing appeals training was a waste of money now there is a new process. She said they had been treated badly as a panel and weren't spoken to very well. She said that Councillor Bassadone wasn't informed of any changes despite being a chairman for appeals for 18 years.

Councillor Taylor said as Chairman of the Audit committee he meets with the relevant officers once a month to go through any issues, changes, etc.

Councillor Conway felt there was a breakdown in communication amongst members and officers.

M Anderson explained that Member Support weren't aware of any of the plans to change the appeals process but we needed to arrange the training swiftly in case an appeal was needed. She said it was a shame to have wasted all that money.

Councillor Douris arrived at 8.34 pm.

Actions:

- Member support to check the details of the annual conference one member had attended.

7. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

M Anderson explained that at December's meeting they would be bringing along details and quotes from three different providers to carry out PDP's for members in February/March 2016. She said they were looking at different providers rather than ones used in the past and looking at changing the process so it's completely new and fresh. She asked whether the group felt the PDP's should be aimed at the new members first or opened up to all members and be available on a first-come first-served basis.

Councillor Taylor felt PDP's were no good if it was just a tick-box exercise. He said member's progress needed to be reviewed regularly.

Councillor Howard said there must be a review process to see what achievements members were making.

Councillor Douris said the timings of the review process were important as if there was too long of a gap in between it would lose significance. He said the process must be smart, strategic and relevant.

M Anderson said the meeting with a potential provider this morning made them realise that the process needed to change and be made more meaningful. She said a progress review meeting was a must.

Councillor Douris said there were hidden values of being a councillor, one being the education you take away with you and it personally costs them nothing.

Councillor Banks felt that members needed to be committed to their development plans otherwise it's just a waste of time and money. She said it was best to focus on the ones that really want it.

Councillor Hicks said that if all 51 councillors did want to put themselves forward for training courses that there wouldn't be enough in the budget for it. M Anderson replied it was surprising how many councillors wanted similar training courses.

Councillor Adshead said that despite many councillors requesting a particular training course only a few of them actually attend.

Councillor Adshead queried if there was a possibility of increasing the budget if there was an appetite for more training. M Anderson said it could be considered.

M Anderson said the committee would be informed of any progress. She added that the group would be expected to make a decision on the process to be followed and which provider to use, at its meeting in December.

8. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2015/16

M Anderson advised that the Mental Health First Aid training scheduled for Tuesday 6 October and Thursday 8 October had been postponed and would need to be rescheduled when the relevant officer returned to work.

Councillor Douris said it was frustrating when sessions were cancelled as he would have booked out that time in his diary to then find it has been postponed.

T Coston said it was also frustrating for them as they have turned down requests from officers that want to do training, due to the lack of availability in the training programme.

M Anderson asked members if they could encourage their colleagues to attend member development sessions and in particular the Budget Setting Process training with James Deane on 22 October 2015.

Actions:

- Member support to advise the new dates for the Mental Health First Aid training once it has been rescheduled.

9. MDSG WORK PROGRAMME

There were no changes or additions to the work programme.

10. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 2 December 2015.

The meeting finished at 9.15 pm.