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**MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING  
GROUP  
AGENDA**

**WEDNESDAY 5 APRIL 2017 AT 7.30 PM  
CONFERENCE ROOM 1 - THE FORUM**

The Councillors listed below are requested to attend the above meeting, on the day and at the time and place stated, to consider the business set out in this agenda.

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

**AGENDA**

- (a) New Councillor Guide (Pages 2 - 4)

# Agenda Item 2a

## **Congratulations – you have been elected!**

### **Now what!**

The moment comes when the returning officer reads out that you have won the election and within minutes the Leader of the Council or Democratic Services hands you a large envelope with various forms for you to complete – and the whirlwind starts now!

The first thing to be aware of is that the business of local government doesn't really stop for elections. Officers carry on with the day to day business and that captures the essence of what being a councillor is about from a Council point of view.

If you are in the administration, the largest political party, you will be party to discussions and decisions generally of a strategic or political nature. You will discuss these in your group meeting when everyone can comment without fear or favour in a confidential climate. This process also applies if you are in an opposition party.

You will also be asked to become a member of one of the various panels or committees – it is expected that you will join 2 of these and to some extent you will be able to express a preference which ones you prefer. It is always the decision of the group leader who goes where and there is frequently a level of balance both in gender and geography exercised. Depending on what committee you sit on there will be about 6 meetings per year of each committee. The Development Control Committee which decides planning applications meets once every 3 weeks.

### **Finding your way around**

The Forum can be a daunting place but everyone is there to help you and will direct you if you need help. The areas are colour coded so officers will be able to tell you which colour group they are in.

### **Working with officers**

Officers are fiercely a-political. Never ask them to express a Party Political opinion. It will embarrass them and it is simply not done. They will always give you the best possible advice but there may be times where you might want to challenge this. If you do always do so with respect and courtesy. Different councillors refer to officers in different ways and vice versa. At first meeting it is likely that an officer will refer to you as 'Hello Councillor' it will be up to you to decide if you want to remain formal or develop a less formal style.

### **Party politics**

Your political group will determine the position that you will take in the public arena and you will have group meetings to discuss the approach to individual issues.

### **So much to learn**

The council provides a wide range of services and frequently after each election there is a display of the various services available to the public. You will no doubt have particular interests but do make sure that you get to find out about all the different services that the council provides as your residents are likely to come to you with questions or problems covering the whole spectrum.

### **Speak up**

Your participation at council meetings is important. Do contribute, no one expects you to talk on every aspect but equally you need to have a positive input during the meeting; it may be to challenge or ask questions of an officer presenting a report or scheme or to make a comment which you may be able to reproduce elsewhere at a later date.

### **Participating at Committees**

Always read the papers for the meeting and be prepared to ask questions and never be afraid to probe what is presented to you. Always do it with good grace and respect for the officers.

### **You are a servant of the public.**

You have been elected by the majority of those voting but your responsibility is to all your constituents. It is always easy to say what the resident wants to hear but unless you are sure of a situation never commit the council to something which may not be possible even if it appears that it is the easiest thing to achieve.

It is always prudent to talk to the officer before responding in detail to the resident but please ensure that you respond with a holding message to the resident as soon as possible, remember that the council does have response times that residents should expect to hear within.

### **Member development**

The council organises an extensive programme of evening courses covering a range of topics which will cover from current governmental directives to local information topics such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which will be relevant to anyone where there is house building or extension in your area to personal development such as effective scrutiny, speed reading and public speaking. You don't have to go to everything but many of these will give you a background to the committees that you serve on and the topics your residents may ask.

### **The growth of Dacorum**

Dacorum is not just Hemel Hempstead; it is just as important to those who live in Berkhamsted, Tring or the numerous villages. All of these have a rich history and it will be helpful if you gain some knowledge of these as the decisions that the Council takes is likely to affect the whole borough.

### **Dealing with the media**

Be very careful what you say. Only say what you will be happy to see in print. Make sure that you have all the facts – the officers will help you if you need specific facts. Sometimes it is better to offer a written reply but reporters will take a single line and use that the headline even if it embedded in the text of your response. There is no harm in telling the reporter that you will call back after you have assembled your response

### **Don't be afraid.**

Other colleagues are here to help. It can be daunting but throw yourself in with commitment and gusto. You are here to serve the residents and support the Council.

Good luck and enjoy it!