

MINUTES

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

1 JUNE 2022

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Barry
Bhinder
Douris (Chairman)
Griffiths
Silwal

Officers:

Also Attendance:

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Freedman

2 MINUTES

Cllr Douris advised that the minutes of the previous meeting were not available.

3 TRAINING PROGRAMME

LFowell advised that she has been contacted by a number of officers asking for member briefing sessions, some of which have already been completed, and the next will take place on 16th June, which is the members' code of conduct training, led by Mark Brookes. The JSP member briefing will take place on 29th June, and confirmation is awaited for the Domestic Abuse Policy. LFowell noted that further dates were being added in due to the number of people asking for slots.

LFowell advised that a brief is sent out to ensure people are aware of what is covered, and whilst attendance has been okay, it has not been great, and she suggested that she speak to the leaders to reiterate the work that goes into the programmes from officers. Cllr Douris stated that he would be comfortable sending out a note to members and LFowell agreed.

Cllr Douris asked if there was a hidden agenda on officers wanting members to be briefed on matters as they are frustrated with the lack of knowledge some members are exhibiting. CONeil suggested it may be that SLT have taken an interest in member development and want any key information to be provided via briefings.

Cllr Douris suggested that 9th February be the last date provided. CONeil added that she has suggested to SLT to use this date for training around pre-election and purdah period, stating that they should also include training for those considering becoming a councillor. CONeil stated that she wants a more robust induction programme that is more engaging and informative for members to ensure the 6-month induction period is a positive experience for new members.

CONeil referred to briefing sessions being oversubscribed, noting that, pre-Covid, an hour-spot was added to the committee diary to take place before the full Council to cover any urgent matters that members required briefing on. It was noted that this could be used for any urgent items if required. Cllr Douris commented that this would need to be limited to items where statutory regulations have changed and suggested it either take place from 6-7pm or 6.15-7.15pm to provide people time for a comfort break before full Council. CONeil noted that full Council is now a much longer meeting and that this would also need to be taken into consideration, adding that she would discuss further ideas for briefings under item 4.

Cllr Barry-Mears joined the meeting.

ACTION: Cllr Douris to send note to members regarding training programme.

ACTION: CONeil to consider use of 9th February meeting.

4 UPDATE FROM SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

CONeil provided a verbal update, noting that Cllr Griffiths had asked for a paper to go to the SLT regarding the member development programme to set out the methodology of the purpose and structure of the programme.

The first area of consideration for improvement is for SLT to have a greater oversight of the programme to recommend training to the MDSG. SLT have an item once a quarter to make any recommendations for key training areas, such as on major contract and project management scrutiny, climate change, Hemel town centre, commercial, and housing compliance and the Building Safety Bill, which was considered to be of key importance to SLT.

Cllr Griffiths commented on housing compliance, noting that this has major ramifications for members and they should therefore be fully briefed to ensure that members are providing full scrutiny to ensure that the council are fully complying. Cllr Griffiths commented that there are currently 6 blocks of flats over 18 metres but the Bill also has ramifications for some of the 5-story buildings, adding that the LGA

provide information on the Bill and this may not be at any extra cost. CONeil confirmed she would look into this further, adding that SLT have asked that any training provided be fit for purpose.

The second area of consideration suggested by the SLT is to create a knowledge hub for councillors with a dedicated area on the intranet that members can easily view from council devices. This will include information such as policies, contact information, the structure chart, FAQs and online officer briefings. Online briefings would allow members to attend at any time and ensure that more members are accessing information.

Cllr Bhinder asked if contacts would be across the board. CONeil commented that they would also need to ensure they have the resource to keep the contact list up to date and that they would also work with heads of service to identify the best point of contact for members and how they would let them know if this changes or that person is away.

Cllr Bhinder commented on external contacts and asked how this would be managed. CONeil stated that this would have to be considered further and would reach out to committee chairs on what they require.

Cllr Griffiths recommended that they have a list of all the council's partners with a link to their main webpage to allow members to get to the correct website. CONeil agreed, adding that this links to a suggestion from Cllr Rogers around ward statistics and other website to access statistical data, noting that they are waiting for the new 2021 census data to be released before starting this work. Cllr Douris commented that you receive a list of local statistics when elected, adding that he would look at what HCC's intranet includes. CONeil commented that these items could be considered as part of the enhanced induction programme to ensure that new members have access to all the information that they require.

The third area for consideration from SLT was to have more of a link between SLT and MDSG regarding poor member attendance. A referral system is in place if non-attendance becomes an issue, particularly for mandatory courses, and it's proposed that there's a greater process where a list of non-attendant councillors is brought as a quarterly report to the SLT for onward referrals to group leaders by the Chief Executive in the first instance and then followed up by the Monitoring Officer.

Cllr Griffiths agreed with the suggestion for the new term, stating that having the Chief Executive involved would add a level of gravitas, and suggested that there be a KPI in the quarterly report with figures rather than naming individual councillors. Cllr Barry-Mears countered this saying that non-attendant councillors should be named and that their roles should be reconsidered if they are not attending mandatory sessions. Cllr Bhinder agreed. Cllr Griffiths commented that they have been elected as individuals and that this made the process more challenging. Cllr Griffiths

suggested that non-attendant councillors be named if the situation doesn't improve, adding that there are many circumstances of why councillors have not attended in their first year. Cllr Douris commented that they should be mindful of the protocols in place, and whilst they refer to some programmes as mandatory, they are not statutorily mandatory and it would therefore be difficult to impose a penalty. Cllr Douris noted a previous discussion around stopping allowances for those who don't attend mandatory meetings and the legal advice was that they could not do this. Cllr Griffiths commented that they could bar councillors from being in groups if they have not completed the relevant associated training.

Cllr Silwal noted the Prevent Radicalisation compliance training for district and borough councillors and asked if this was mandatory online training. Cllr Douris requested that they discuss this item later.

Cllr Bhinder commented that action should be taken for missing a certain number of sessions and that DBC should look to maintain a certain standard, part of which is attending training. Cllr Bhinder acknowledged Cllr Griffiths' comments that councillors are elected, not employed, and that to represent their people they need to fully understand the processes they are involved with. Cllr Bhinder agreed that the situation is a challenge and that they should look to find a way to improve standards. Cllr Griffiths agreed that they should try to improve standards, though they cannot un-elect councillors, and they should instead focus on the underlying challenges of why councillors don't want to attend. Cllr Douris agreed that they should try to educate their new members to ensure they have the best councillors possible.

Cllr Bhinder stated that the induction needs to be designed to ensure that new councillors are properly guided through the processes. Cllr Douris noted that they are looking at holding a training session for prospective councillors to ensure they are aware of the demands they will likely face. Cllrs Bhinder and Griffiths agreed with this. Cllr Griffiths suggested that a paper from DBC be sent to prospective councillors with their valid nomination form to outline what will be expected of them if they are nominated.

Cllr Bhinder commented that the use of IT has increased exponentially since he became a councillor, and particularly since the pandemic and that this is an example of where the council could come forward more on this as it is now a greater requirement of the role.

CONEil noted that they require sufficient resources within the democratic support team to ensure that all information is up to date and signposted to councillors. Cllr Bhinder commented that some intranets contain a lot of information, and having a quick find section would be helpful. CONeil suggested they hold a specific session on this when they look at designing the information portal.

CONeil advised that the last suggestion was to develop an induction plan for 2023 borough elections, including a 'becoming a councillor' event in early 2023. A purdah briefing has also been requested for the beginning of February.

CONeil stated that she is now doing more horizon scanning on what is being made available by the East of England Local Government Association and other free training that is available to councillors, and she is looking to ensure the induction programmes for next year encompass the information available to support members. CONeil explained that they would look at being a local councillor, the aims and objectives of DBC, and personal safety for ward councillors and personal risk assessments. CONeil noted that they may want to reintroduce ward walks and ward surgeries as they come out of Covid and therefore they need to be more mindful of keeping councillors safe.

Cllr Douris noted that Cllr Griffiths had taken part in some local government training during lockdown. Cllr Griffiths advised that she had taken a number of courses online and had also taken one on the Building Safety Bill, which was of no cost to the council. CONeil stated that she would include programmes in the member news, highlighting that they would need to consider how to manage expectations around paid courses.

Cllr Douris referred back to Cllr Silwal's earlier point on online training on preventing radicalisation and asked if every councillor had to complete this. CONeil confirmed she was unaware of this training and had not been alerted it had been added. LFowell commented that they have requested on a number of occasions to see what councillors see on DORIS. CONeil asked who had added it as a mandatory course as it had not come through the MDSG. Cllr Douris advised that Prevent training was agreed to be mandatory by central government. CONeil added that they need to be aware of what mandatory training is being added to councillors' DORIS so they can ensure this is being promoted and completed.

Cllr Douris commented that he had accessed the intranet through his DBC laptop and was unable to find DORIS, adding that he finds the website particularly unintuitive. Cllr Silwal agreed that it is difficult to find your training records. Cllr Bhinder stated that there should be a shortcut to DORIS. Cllr Douris commented that the data was wrong on DORIS and that the only link he could find from DENNIS to the public homepage for Dacorum was to save it as a favourite. LFowell agreed that there should be a DORIS shortcut on the homepage. Cllr Douris stated that DORIS should also provide reliable information and that he felt it was currently failing elected members. CONeil noted that it has been acknowledged by Claire that prior training is not on DORIS and that HR are yet to provide a solution for this.

CONeil left the meeting.

Cllr Douris asked that it be fed back to Claire that they have discussed deficiencies around DORIS over the past 2 years and that it was yet to improve. LFowell confirmed that the issue would remain open.

Cllr Douris asked councillors for further comments on DORIS. Cllr Griffiths noted the issue of completed training not showing up, adding that this looks poor as the deputy leader of the council. Cllr Silwal asked if the Prevent training was mandatory, to which LFowell suggested that it was mandatory for all members and employees. Cllr Bhinder commented that they need better access and data, suggesting that they categorise the issues they are facing to help the software team. Cllr Barry-Mears agreed with the points already raised.

Cllr Douris noted the previous discussion regarding bite-size information sessions ahead of full council meetings. Cllr Griffiths commented that these would be difficult to attend if working and would make it a very long evening. Cllr Griffiths suggested this could be held via Teams and recorded to allow anyone unable to attend in person to access it at their own convenience. LFowell clarified that it could be used by exception for urgent matters. Cllr Griffiths stated she had not attended them in the past as she was unable to, though it may be preferable for some to spend 1 longer evening out rather than 2 shorter evenings. Cllr Bhinder recommended that they try it, noting the importance of the issues being addressed. Cllr Barry-Mears agreed it may be easier for it all to be held on 1 night and that they should trial it. Cllr Silwal commented that recorded meetings are ideal for people to access at a later date. Cllr Douris noted that they could have a pre-recorded session for members or that it be recorded for people to access at a later time. Cllr Douris added that they would also need to consider the resource required to put this in place.

ACTION: CONeil to look into LGA provision for councils regarding Building Safety Bill.

ACTION: CONeil to consider availability of external contacts.

5 **BUDGET**

LFowell presented the budget, noting that the attendance and accommodation fees for the 2 group leaders are paid for and that the accommodation fees are yet to be committed to the budget.

Cllrs Griffiths and Bhinder joined the meeting.

Cllr Douris asked if any recompense is made to officers for in-house presentations. It was confirmed that they do not. Cllr Douris queried if a notional figure should be added to the budget to demonstrate what would be paid if they were asking for an outside speaker. CONeil advised that year 4 is a quieter year as most mandatory training has been provided and there hasn't been as much external facilitation. CONeil noted that this has been discussed at SLT as they need to consider whether

year 4 should be used for personal development and how the budget would be divided. CONeil added that they could also look at mentoring or a return to PDRs and this will be discussed further at a future meeting.

6 **AOB**

Cllr Bhinder commented on portfolio holder training and asked that this be considered. Cllr Griffiths agreed, stating that ongoing training is essential and added that Chairs should also receive training to help them assist the committees with scrutiny. Cllr Bhinder stated that there is already training for Chairs and that being a portfolio holder is a big responsibility.

The Meeting ended at 8.40 pm