

## MINUTES

### MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

21 JUNE 2023

**Present:**

**Members:**

**Councillors:** Banks  
Barry (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Douris  
Mitchell  
Taylor (Chair)  
Williams

**Officers:**

LFowell  
CO,Neil

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

#### **1                    APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were noted from Cllr Freedman.

It was noted that Cllr Douris had previously given apologies and that Cllr Williams would attend as his alternate. It was confirmed that Cllr Douris would also be joining the meeting.

#### **2                    BUDGET**

L Fowell advised that the budget was not published as there is currently nothing showing as depleted from the budget. The budget set for the year is £7,000 and that they will be close to hitting this due to being in an induction year and having higher training costs. The budget renews every year and training is booked up until 2024, and whilst additional officer briefings can be arranged, there would be little scope for any further external training outside of what has already been scheduled.

L Fowell asked members to consider any additional training required and confirmed that this would have to go back to Finance through the Portfolio Holder.

C O'Neil suggested that the budget has been reduced this year and that other methods of training delivery as well as briefings, will be looked into. It was noted that some investment may be requested to build an online hub and that further free courses and packages are being explored through the LGA.

The Chair noted that the budget in the first year of each council should be slightly higher than other years to reflect the increased demand. L Fowell confirmed that a more populated budget would be presented at the next meeting to look at what remaining budget is left.

L Fowell advised that no cost is associated with internal officer briefings, and whilst this has been considered, officers are keen to provide briefings and that no benefit was found from attributing costs. C O'Neil added that the budget is generally spent on mandatory training and that attendance figures can be reported in the next quarter, which will allow MDSG to assess if they are getting the best value from their training. C O'Neil advised that the LGA refused to attend to provide training due to only 3 members attending the last session and it was therefore not considered the best use of their time.

Cllr Barry-Mears recommended that they evaluate the success of training and the impact that it has had. L Fowell confirmed that they are looking to develop an online evaluation form. C O'Neil suggested that the online form could be drafted and circulated to members to agree what questions should be included.

The Chair queried the forward plan for the Committee and suggested that members be surveyed on what they would like to see within the training programme. The Chair suggested that this be discussed further under item 5.

L Fowell confirmed that the budget will be published as a standing item for future meetings.

### **3                    ATTENDANCE**

L Fowell advised that they are working with HR regarding how to record training. C O'Neil noted that a question on this could be included in the survey to better understand members' learning styles and how they prefer to receive training.

Cllr Barry-Mears noted the benefits of receiving training in-person and how this can also help with team building. C O'Neil advised that there has been a request from a back office to provide briefings and that they can use the MDSG on how this training would be best delivered.

Looking at the work programme, L Fowell advised that they look to get officers to submit requests to the MDSG.

The Chair asked that a more general discussion on this take place under item 5.

Cllr Williams commented that he and Cllr Belinda Williams had attended member development licence training but were shown as not having attended. It was suggested that this may be due to their late arrival and that L Fowell confirmed that an email would be circulated to check attendance. L Fowell added that she had checked attendance early into the training for initial sessions with a signing-in sheet provided at subsequent sessions.

#### **4**                    **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT 2023/2024**

L Fowell noted the plan up to April 2024. C O'Neil advised on the challenges in year 1 given the level of mandatory training required and that they would look, where applicable, to offer recorded sessions for members to view.

Cllr Williams commented on the mandatory sessions and suggested that if they are looking to hold two sessions to accommodate members, then these should be organised several weeks apart.

Cllr Banks recommended that they look at evening training sessions to accommodate members that work full time. L Fowell noted that daytime training has been less popular and that they generally look to hold training in the evening. C O'Neil added that this is why they are looking at other methods to allow members to access training.

Cllr Barry-Mears asked if a further date will be provided for chair and vice-chair training. L Fowell noted that they were asked to put the initial training in as soon as possible and that they are looking at how they can utilise this training in a video format. Cllr Barry-Mears suggested that chairing training should be provided in-person. L Fowell advised that a short self-serve session is available on DORIS looking at leading a meeting and they will be looking at what items can be moved to a more formal councillor self-serve area. C O'Neil added that they will look to have a spotlight on training in the weekly newsletter to highlight certain items and that they could take feedback from the MDSG on what these items should be.

C O'Neil advised that two sessions have been booked for ICT and members support training, though these dates could be used for additional mandatory training instead. L Fowell added that she is also looking to secure a date for scrutiny training and advised that it is a challenge to book external facilitators given the number of boroughs that are also conducting year 1 training. L Fowell advised that scrutiny training would be a priority item and that they will look to schedule this where possible.

The Chair referred to his earlier comment regarding surveying all councillors to understand their thoughts on training, stating that this should be discussed via email by the MDSG over the coming weeks and develop a plan based on feedback for the next two years.

The Chair commented that he had received feedback that it was felt the session regarding the organisation of the Council was too rushed and that there were queries regarding what level of documentation there is available on each session to prevent members having to take copious notes.

The Chair suggested that a matrix of how different parts of the Council align with each scrutiny committee would be beneficial and to understand what other forms of income make up department budgets.

The Chair recommended that training be provided on local government finance and budget ahead of the next budget cycle. It was confirmed that a budget-setting session is booked for 5 October 2023 with the first budget to come in November.

The Chair advised that it would be beneficial for members to understand the roles of the different councils and how Dacorum relates to other government bodies.

The Chair suggested that a set of FAQs be developed on how councillors engage with the public and what questions are typically asked to allow members to better understand how the Council can better communicate with the public.

The Chair recommended that the MDSG look at learning styles and methods of delivery and he noted the benefits of blended learning. L Fowell advised that they have discussed utilising DORIS for councillors. C O'Neil added that they are also looking at any mandatory training for officers that could also be mandatory for councillors, such as fire marshal training and risk assessments.

C O'Neil advised that there is an LGA councillor hub and that councillors also have basic access to LG Inform, a local area benchmarking tool provided by the LGA, noting that they are looking to provide an instructional video as part of the councillor hub to allow councillors to look up information.

The Chair asked officers to put out a summary to members on what they are considering for training and that councillors can then note their feedback on this as well as stating their own recommendations. The Chair advised that this could then be used to create the full survey.

L Fowell confirmed that she would circulate the list of areas that officers want, to provide briefings on and that this can then be formulated into a work plan.

The Chair noted the suggestion to have regular briefings scheduled in and asked that consideration be given for the wider schedule. L Fowell confirmed that member development dates are planned for the year, though additional dates can be booked in and there is flexibility.

The Chair asked if any officer briefings are proposed for the next 3 months. L Fowell noted that dates in July and August have been requested, though these will not be possible due to the number of dates already booked in. C O'Neil noted the proposed briefing on the local cycle and walking infrastructure plan and suggested that this would need to be assessed in terms of priority and delivery. L Fowell advised that July already has a number of sessions booked in, Council will be in recess in August and that there are a significant number of committee meetings already booked in for September. L Fowell recommended that they look to hold the briefing on the local cycle and walking infrastructure plan in October, otherwise they need to look at an alternative delivery method. Cllr Barry-Mears suggested that they also look at virtual meetings. C O'Neil agreed, stating that they need to decide the aim of the training and what style of delivery is most appropriate.

C O'Neil confirmed that they would ask for more information regarding the local cycle and walking infrastructure plan briefing to understand why it needs to be provided.

L Fowell advised that they will have a set amount of member development dates alongside a number of reserve dates and look to populate these.

Cllr Barry-Mears noted that feedback was given regarding how to claim back childcare and that there was confusion regarding parking. L Fowell advised that it has been a busy period post-election and that links and information can be re-circulated. C O'Neil confirmed that there will be ICT and member support drop-in sessions for members to ask any questions. L Fowell advised that these sessions have deliberately been scheduled for September to allow members to get through their initial two months and recess. L Fowell confirmed that councillors can also email Democratic Support at any time regarding any queries.

The Chair asked if an email can be sent to all members explaining what Democratic Support does and suggested that they include a range of previous requests to help demonstrate to members that they can ask any questions. C O'Neil added that Democratic Support can also help members find the right person to contact regarding queries.

L Fowell asked the Committee if they would like to proceed with in-person meetings or to hold them via Teams. Cllr Barry-Mears suggested that meetings would work well online given the limited size of the Committee. L Fowell asked the Committee to consider, noting that they could be flexible on whether they are in-person or via Teams.

C O'Neil commented that the LGIU has opened nominations for the Councillor Awards 2023, noting that she would circulate further information and asked members to consider any colleagues that they would like to nominate. It was noted that it would be the responsibility of the person making the nomination to fill out all relevant paperwork as there is limited capacity for officers to assist with this. C O'Neil advised that this has also been raised with SLT and recommended that this also be pushed out to the public.

Cllr Douris queried how the Councillor Awards are delivered. Cllr Williams advised that it was held in Bath last year and could be viewed online. Cllr Douris stated that whilst he was in favour of councillors being recognised, they should be mindful of the public perception of councillors attending such an event. C O'Neil acknowledged the comment and stated that they should also ensure that they are recognising achievement, noting that this year's will be hosted by the City of London, and that if they do have a shortlisted candidate, then they could look to hold a local event and attend virtually.

Cllr Barry-Mears asked if training could be provided to new members regarding managing client relations and managing case files as well as managing expectations of residents. L Fowell advised that this could be included within the survey as a suggestion, noting that there is also advice on this via the LGA and they could also look at what training is already available. Cllr Barry-Mears recommended that they also look at ensuring that any training hub is accessible.

There being no further business, the meeting was formally closed.

**Actions:**

L Fowell to circulate email regarding member development training to check attendance.

L Fowell to circulate officer briefing proposals to members for consideration.

L Fowell and C O'Neil to circulate introduction to Democratic Support to all members.

The Meeting ended at 8.50 pm