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Dear Michelle

**Ref. Personal Development Plans (PDP's). Report for the Member Development Steering Group at Dacorum Borough Council (DBC).**

We are pleased to report that the PDP Review process for 18 members has now been completed. As promised, please find (herewith) a summary of our findings along with recommendations

**Acknowledgements**

Link Support Services (UK) Ltd would like to thank those members taking part in this review for their enthusiastic and enlightening participation. Thanks are also due to Michelle Anderson for supporting the organisation of the reviews and – finally – to our experienced reviewer Phil O'Brien for his expert support and recommendations

**Background**

In December 2015, the Member Development Steering Group at Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) commissioned Link Support Services (UK) Ltd to carry out ('1-1') *Personal Development Reviews* (PDP's) with elected members. The aim of this pilot programme was to assess member development needs and assist DBC to understand and schedule appropriate member development support, for those members taking part in the reviews. The reviews were – in the first instance – targeted at **new members** but the review process also welcomed other members wishing to participate

Members taking part in this pilot will be reviewed again in 6 months (i.e. Oct 2016) to assess whether (a) they have met (or are making progress towards meeting) their development needs and (b) have identified any new development needs

Link Support Services UK Ltd is a specialist member development company and enjoys a leading position in the member training market place. It is currently in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year of trading

This brief report identifies the overall development needs of those members taking part in the 1-1 reviews and comments on a number of thematic points raised by members. Link recommends that DBC uses the **'7 S' member development strategy** outlined by Link (below) which was formulated and informed by the PDP's undertaken

### **Key facts**

(a) 18 DBC Councillors took part in a Personal Development Review Process on a 1-1 basis with an external Learning Adviser from Link Support Services (UK) Ltd

(b) The first review took place on 10 February 2016 and the last review took place on 25 March 2016

**12** reviews were completed at the offices of DBC

**6** reviews were completed by telephone

no reviews were completed by email only

(c) All members received a confidential copy of their own PDP by email

(d) All members were made aware that anonymised data would be used to help inform ongoing member development at DBC

(e) Of the 18 reviews carried out, 9 members were new members (elected 2015) and 9 members had served more than one term

## **Findings:**

### ***Availability of members to attend training courses:***

Of the 18 members taking part:

9 members preferred **evening** courses only

2 members preferred **day time** courses only

7 members were could attend **daytime or evening**

Additionally, 2 members expressed an interest in training at the **weekend**

N.B. The total is greater than 18 as some members expressed two equal preferences i.e.

<b>1</b>	Morning only		Evening only	<b>9</b>
<b>1</b>	Afternoon only		Anytime during the day or evening	<b>7</b>
	Morning or Afternoon		Additionally two members expressed an interest in training at the Weekend	<b>2</b>

### ***Learning styles: (i.e. how do members prefer to learn?)***

13 members preferred to learn by attendance at a Seminar/Workshop

4 members preferred to learn by Self-study

2 members preferred to learn by coaching from an external trainer

2 members preferred to learn by coaching from an officer

2 members preferred to learn by case studies and 'learning by doing'

1 member preferred to learn by E-Learning

N.B The total is greater than 18 as some members expressed two equal preferences i.e.

<b>13</b>	Seminar/Workshop		1-1 Coaching by officer	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	1-1 Coaching by external trainer		Self-study	<b>4</b>
<b>1</b>	E-Learning		Other – case studies and 'learning by doing.'	<b>2</b>

## **'Essential' learning needs (i.e. top priorities for training) – statistical summary:**

Members were asked to consider essential and desirable training needs. **Essential** training needs were ranked in order of importance (1,2,3 etc.) and collated for statistical purposes. 'Essential' training needs are considered as the priority starting point for formalised member training. The findings are as follows:

### ***First priority topics for training***

7 Members ranked '**Improved Scrutiny**' as priority number one  
3 Members ranked '**Speed Reading**' as priority number one  
3 Members each ranked '**Social Media**', (2) '**Public Speaking**' and (2) '**Managing Casework**', as priority number one (1) '**Chairing Skills**'

### ***Second priority topics for training***

4 Members ranked '**Media Skills Awareness**' as priority number two  
4 Members ranked '**Effective Time & Stress Management**' as priority number two  
3 Members ranked '**Speed Reading**' as priority number two  
7 Members reported no further preferences

### ***Third priority topics for training***

7 Members ranked '**Improved Scrutiny**' as priority number three  
2 Members each ranked '**Social Media**', (1) '**Speed Reading**' and (1) '**Engagement Strategies**' as priority number three  
7 Members reported no further preferences

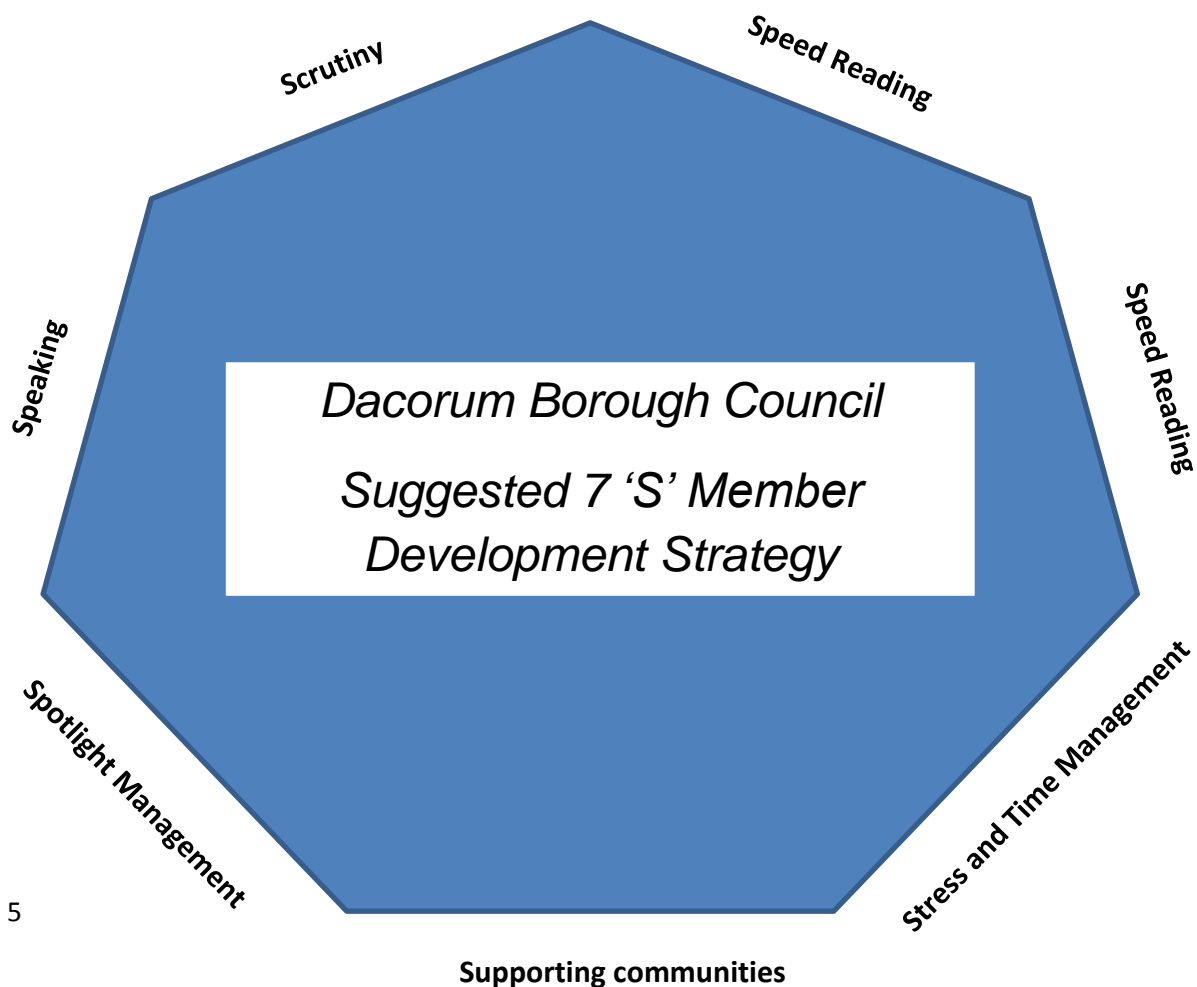
### ***Fourth priority topics for training***

3 Members ranked '**Public Speaking**' as priority number four  
2 Members ranked '**Planning/Development Control**' as priority number four  
13 Members reported no further preferences

## Recommendations:

Based on member training preferences expressed through the PDP reviews it is recommended that the following **learning opportunities** be offered to members (preferably in the priority order shown) on the basis of an **interactive evening workshop** (one per topic). All members (and in some topics) As an aid to member planning this is referred to as the '**7 S**' strategy i.e.

- 1 **Scrutiny:** particularly, effective use of Task and Finish projects
- 2 **Speed Reading:** improving reading rate, comprehension and retention
- 3 **Social Media:** Safe and confident use to engage with communities
- 4 **Speaking** (in public) including preparation strategies and delivery
- 5 **Supporting communities** through advocacy (including casework management)
- 6 **Spotlight management** (*media skills awareness*)
- 7 **Stress** and time management. Practical strategies to cope with pressure, and manage member work-loads effectively



Two members who had identified 'Development Control' as an area of interest (as a fourth choice option) were encouraged to liaise directly with relevant officers

### **Additional observations relating to member learning needs**

Our PDP reviewer reports that the majority of reviews made comment on the introduction of i-Pads. Whilst no Members stated that they are wedded to paper, or resistant to technology, most felt that the performance offered by the i-Pads inhibits their effectiveness. The key area of concern relates to '*over-complex passwords and too short a time before the tablet hibernates*'. Link Support Services (UK) Ltd has observed this issue in other councils and may be able to advise on a solution

There was a divergence, between newly elected Members and those returned at the May 2015 election, on the existence and effectiveness of Mentoring within the majority group. Many members felt that effective mentoring was a good idea and that expert support should be provided to introduce an effective mentoring process and that this should be formalised before the next election in 2019

The majority of members undertaking reviews mentioned that Scrutiny could be more effectively utilised at Dacorum BC as an improvement planning and policy development tool – particularly through Task and Finish groups – and that training should be undertaken in this area as a priority. There was however no criticism of the willingness of Cabinet Members and senior officers to attend meetings and *be 'held to account'*

Although the '7 S strategy is informed by PDP discussions with 18 members it should also be born in mind that

- (a) DBC has 51 Councillors and that a review of the remaining (33) Councillors would be appropriate for a fully informed member development strategy
- (b) Member training requirements are also determined by factors which can be driven by outside events (e.g. legislative changes) or corporate aspirations (e.g. to continuously develop the effectiveness of the member/ officer partnership, support the development of member's IT skills)

Never the less, this project has been undertaken in meticulous detail with an enthusiastic cohort of members intent on developing their skills. We have aimed to learn about their development needs, agree these with members and inform DBC of the trends and a prospective strategy. We are confident that this strategy will engage members' interest and support their community and corporate leadership needs in key areas

**Date of report:** 22nd April 2016

**Report Author:** David McGrath  
(Managing Director Link Support Services (UK) Ltd)