

**MEMBERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL
MONDAY, 10TH JUNE, 2013**

Present:- Councillor Akhtar (in the Chair); Councillors Buckley, Dodson, Falvey, Smith, Steele and Wootton.

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Gosling, Havenhand, Lakin, Pickering and Rushforth.

23. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15TH APRIL, 2013

Agreed:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th April, 2013, were agreed as a correct record.

With regards to Minute No. 20 (Member Development Programme) it was noted that collaborative arrangements were being explored with the other South Yorkshire Authorities and also the L.G.I.U. Further information would be provided in due course.

Reference was made to Minute No. 21 (Personal Development Plans) and the plans for Cabinet Members, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Select Commissions and Regulatory Boards and Area Assembly Chairs and Vice-Chairs to be contacted with regards to any learning and personal development requirements.

24. REPORT WRITING AND PLAIN ENGLISH - OUTCOMES OF ELECTED MEMBER SURVEY

Further to Minute No. 19 of the previous meeting held on 15th April, 2013, consideration was given to a report presented by Caroline Webb, Senior Scrutiny Adviser, which summarised the outcomes of an online survey of Elected Members with regard to the standard of report writing within the Council and the provision of information in support of Elected Members. Recommendations were, therefore, made based on those results.

The main issues raised by those responding were:-

- Reports too long.
- Too much repetition/duplication of information.
- Too many acronyms used (often without explanation).
- Too much jargon.
- Too many officers are copying and pasting information into reports, without tailoring them according to the specific meeting/audience and the roles/responsibilities/powers of those reading the report.

- Recommendations and impact assessments need to be clearer.
- Particular problems with complex terminology, jargon and acronyms were identified in the highways and planning sections of EDS, although some respondents also mentioned Resources, Finance, CYPS and Social Services as being problematic.

Neighbourhoods and Adult Services were mentioned as a positive example of report writing and one member said Children and Young People's Services were much improved.

Discussion ensued on how good practice could be shared throughout the Council and the on the need to follow up the survey in twelve months time.

It was also suggested that the findings of this survey be shared with the Strategic Leadership Team.

Agreed:- (1) That all officers be reminded of the "Clear Communication" section on the intranet as part of RMBC's formal induction process.

(2) That all reports prepared for Elected Members should start with a brief, clear executive summary, and include a glossary of terms/acronyms used within the report.

(3) That a manager briefing on best practice around report writing be distributed across the Council, with reminders of the key supporting documents available to officers.

(4) That consideration be given, subject to cost, to the provision of awareness and skills raising for staff required to prepare reports through the Council's existing schedule of meetings and training.

(5) That Directorates be encouraged to share good practice and to continue their own internal improvement programmes in this area of work.

(6) That a further survey take place in 12 months time to review impact.

25. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER

Consideration was given to a report presented by Tracey Parkin, Human Resources Manager, which detailed how the Council re-achieved the Charter for Member Development in February, 2011 and would be due for re-assessment in February, 2014. Changes at Local Government Yorkshire and Humber now meant that any future assessments would be managed by North East Employers.

Previous assessments have been heavily based around collation of paper-based evidence, with an additional day on site, supplemented by telephone interviews, as necessary. Review panels have consisted of

officers from at Local Government Yorkshire and Humber, supported by an Elected Member from another Council within the region.

The last assessment resulted in a small number of development recommendations, all of which have been considered by the Member Development Panel and implemented, as appropriate.

Given the changing nature of Councils and the work of Councillors, member development officers within the region have been keen to see the Charter approach change, both to reflect the new demands of Elected Members, but also to reduce the emphasis on production of documentation and to focus more on outcomes, results and Elected Member perception.

The South Yorkshire network of member development officers sought clarity from North East Employers as to their approach, although the response received so far indicated that the assessment would operate much as before.

The cost for the assessment would be £1,500. Additional to this would be the time commitment of officers in collating portfolios of information to provide to assessors, together with Members time in interviews.

The Charter framework was available for reference and could be used as a self-assessment tool, without external accreditation. This self-assessment approach was the model the Council had taken with respect to the Equalities Framework and Customer Service.

Similarly, the Council used an internal assessment approach to the Investors in People standard, although maintaining an external accreditation element, to measure the Council against the higher performance requirements of a Gold employer (achieved in 2009). The Council recognises that in terms of its reputation as an employer, this additional accreditation was beneficial.

This Panel was asked if they wished to consider the additional benefits to the Council of seeking formal accreditation for Member development. As an alternative, a review group of officers and Members could carry out a self-assessment against the framework to identify any areas for improvement.

Should further information on an alternative model being offered from regional employers become available, this would be shared with Members for re-consideration.

The Panel weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of seeking Charter status and the benefits to the Council. However, it was felt that the benefits from the Charter were now embedded in member development processes and did not feel it worthwhile, both in cost and Member/Officer time, to pursue re-assessment.

Agreed:- That the formal Charter status for Member Development not be pursued and that arrangements be made for a self-assessment process against the framework to identify any areas for improvement.

26. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY 2013-13

Consideration was given to a report presented by Caroline Webb, Senior Scrutiny Adviser, which provided an overview of activity in respect of Member Development over the previous municipal year relating to:-

- Summary of Activities 2012/13.
- Induction of New Members and Evaluation.
- Generic Programme.
- ICT Training.
- Planning and Licensing.
- Leadership.
- Regional and Sub-Regional Working.
- Seminars.
- Other Developments.

Discussion ensued on the good practice that existed in the sharing of information between Elected Members and Officers.

All those involved in the Member Development process and in the arranging of activities were thanked for their hard work and the appreciation from Elected Members was endorsed.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That all those involved in the Member Development process be thanked for their hard work and commitment.

27. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting of the Members' Training and Development Panel be held on Monday, 9th September, 2013, commencing at 11.00 a.m.