

Member Development Strategy

"For Members, by Members"

**Member Development & Training Panel
Rotherham MBC
October 2010**

Member Development Strategy

Profile of the Council

Rotherham is a metropolitan borough in South Yorkshire comprising a diverse and vibrant blend of people, cultures and communities. The 63 elected members have a number of roles including providing community leadership and representing their constituents' interests through the council. The current council make up is 50 Labour members, 9 Conservative, 3 Independent and 1 BNP. All members of Rotherham MBC are required to attend meetings of the full Council. The Council political management structure is that of a Cabinet forming the executive with non-Cabinet members forming into 5 Scrutiny Panels. There are also 7 area assemblies which operate at a local level.

The Council has a local strategic partnership and has worked together with partners to develop a new vision for the borough which will steer progress over the next 10 to 20 years. The member development strategy aims to ensure members are properly supported and have the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out their roles.

Introduction

Local Government is going through a period of unprecedented change arising from the Coalition Government's intended programme. Not least will be the intention to give councils more power but less money. The next couple of years and beyond look to be the most turbulent for a long time as members wrestle with the implications of the recent Comprehensive Spending review.

Members and officers of councils up and down the country are considering how they will deliver the huge savings the local government sector will have to find over the next few years. This is a daunting task which will bring many stresses and strains. What of the pain of likely redundancies and what of the potential political and managerial fallout.

The Queens speech on 25th May 2010 stated that a Bill would be introduced to devolve greater powers to councils and neighborhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions.

The Decentralisation and Localism Bill, which is expected to be presented to Parliament in the autumn, includes changes to planning laws, housing policy and constitutional arrangements and is the mechanism by which many of the coalition government's recently-announced policy measures for local government will be implemented. It will also introduce a general power of competence for local authorities.

Some of the main tenets of the Bill include

- Create Local Enterprise Partnerships (to replace Regional Development Agencies) – joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities to promote local economic development.

- New powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services.
- Abolish the Standards Board regime.
- Give councils a general power of competence.
- Give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases.
- Greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups.
- Create new trusts that would make it simpler for communities to provide homes for local people.
- Review Housing Revenue Account.

The results of this leadership challenge will provide expectations that elected members will:

- Connect more effectively with community advocates, provide a steer for them and represent community needs within the council and with partner service providers, by setting local action plans and ensuring delivery.
- Set policies, targets and outcomes within the Council that meet community needs and challenge results and progress through both Cabinet and Scrutiny functions.
- Perform regulatory functions which ensure that community needs and aspirations are both met and protected.
- Work with a full range of partners to secure positive outcomes for the area and community and challenge performance.

It is against a background of changing demands, expectations and aspirations that this Member Development Strategy provides for members of the Council to be equipped with the skills and experience to meet these challenges and secure an excellent performing Council for the benefit of Rotherham as a whole.

Rising to the challenge

The Council has a long established Members' Training and Development Panel, chaired by the Deputy Leader, to drive the needs of member development.

The Panel oversees the whole of the member development programme, evaluation and new developments. Opportunities for member development and training have been devised after careful analysis of need. In addition, the Council has expanded the facilities available to members to develop their roles through e-government innovations.

Definition of Member Development

To provide clarity for the work of the panel, a definition of what constitutes member development has been adopted as: "Any development activities or training programmes specifically designed to improve the knowledge; skills and abilities of elected members in their individual or collective roles in meeting RMBC's Corporate objectives and as agreed via individual development plans".

Commitment to Member Development Charter

The Council is committed to maintaining the Yorkshire and Humber Charter for Elected Member Development as a hallmark of good practice in Rotherham. The Charter has been developed in partnership with IDeA. The concept of a charter was borne out of a desire to encourage commitment to member development and to acknowledge those authorities who demonstrate that commitment. The Council signed up to the charter in October 2005 with a view to going forward for formal re-assessment this year.

Strategic Assessment and Delivery

In recognition of the varying and sometimes complex mix of training and skills development needs of members, the strategy sets out assessments and delivery in the following blocks:

- All members
- Cabinet members
- Scrutiny
- Regulatory functions
- Working in partnership

This enables a pick and mix approach for access to training and development opportunities tailored to the needs and aspirations of the individual member. For instance upon being selected as the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, arrangements were made for that member's attendance at the I&DeA's Leadership Academy.

To support Members in gaining the skills and capacity to meet the challenges of local government in the 21st century, the Council has supported places on the IDeA's Leadership Academy.

A number of Elected Members have already attended the programmes and feedback has been very positive

All Members

The Strategy recognises the common needs of all members. Such needs include:

- Induction for new members
- I.T. skills and the use of relevant Council systems
- Overview of finance
- Equalities
- Ethical frameworks
- Dealing with casework
- Personal safety
- Health & Safety
- Emergency Planning
- The role of Councillors as Corporate Parents
- Chairing meetings
- Public speaking
- Local Government finance

The approach of a “seasonal” programme has been developed in recognition that training needs can vary through the year to match the business cycle. The seasonal approach is being further refined to provide a consistent programme addressing identified ongoing development needs for all members. Induction includes sessions such as How the Council Works, Council Business, Equalities and Diversity, and Ethics and Probity, all of which introduced new members to the systems of the Council. Speaking in Public gives members support in effective public speaking, coinciding with their newly elected positions. The finance module coincides with members beginning the budget process and the role they have to play in that e.g. members have received specific training on The Gershon and Lyons reviews when they were released.

Examples of the training to season are as follows:

Summer

- Induction for new members
- Induction Programme
- IT training

Autumn

- The role of Councillors as Corporate Parents
- Focus on taxi licensing – out of Rotherham
- Understanding the budget – out of Rotherham
- Simulation of setting a council budget – out of Rotherham
- Licensing – Skills masterclass in decision making – out of Rotherham

Winter

Spring

Other initiatives to support the development of members include:

- A handbook for all members;
- E-learning CDs and online e-learning.
- Member mentoring with members from other local authorities. This has been especially successful in supporting the community leadership in the ward role eg introducing neighbourhood walkabouts.

E Casework

E Casework allows Councillors to input their surgery details in a variety of ways to suit them, including the following:

- By inputting directly on the system
- By using Town Hall Secretariat staff

This enables all Members of the Council to choose the way in which they prefer to deal with their surgery requests.

All surgery requests have a dedicated case number and can be traced via the above methods.

Members' Websites

Members are encouraged to design and create their own websites linked from the Council website. They are supported in this by officers who can advise on and devise the content to suit Member needs. Successful websites so far include a Biography of the Councillor, Surgery Arrangements, Latest News and Contact Details. Updating is undertaken by the Member Support Team.

Cabinet Members and Chairs of Scrutiny

Cabinet members, chairs of Scrutiny panels and advisers to Cabinet members all take on specific responsibilities that are crucial to the effective running of the Council. Learning and development needs, especially in providing leadership and challenge are paramount. The strategy makes specific provision for the development of such skills, not just for those members currently in these key positions, but also for those who aspire to develop into these roles.

Identification of relevant training and development needs and aspirations is achieved through producing a **personal learning and development plan for the members concerned. Training and development opportunities are then identified.** These will often be subject specific courses offered by the I&DeA, member mentoring of events organised locally or within the region.

Members of Regulatory Committees

The Council's principal regulatory functions requiring member committee decision making are:

- Planning;
- Licensing
- Audit
- Standards

All four require the development of knowledge and skills in the relevant tasks. This is against the background of considerable change. In planning, changes to national and regional planning policy and guidance impact on local development decisions. In licensing, the council has already taken on increased licensing functions and next year will become responsible for licences relating to gambling. Audit committees are a relatively new function in local government, following good practice guidance and the "Use of Resources" test applied each year as part of the CPA score refresh.

Specific training to address regulatory functions are:

- Probity in Planning;
- Audit Committee – for Audit Committee members and Finance Advisers;
- Licensing
- Emergency Planning
- Standards - Ethics and Probity

Working in Partnership

The Council seeks always to work effectively and efficiently alongside partners, and this is central within Member Development. One example of this was when a Scrutiny Review of "Working with Parish Councils" was undertaken which led to the development of the Parish Charter. This Charter recognises the elected legitimacy of

Parishes and promotes a partnership approach to joint working. Recommendations also included joint training and development sessions. This has been applied to member development with training open to Borough and Parish Councillors encouraging partnership working between officers and members. A Parish Council representative has been co-opted onto the Member Development Panel.

There has been joint training of scrutiny members, panel co-optees and ALMO board members to integrate them closer in partnership with the Council. Rotherham LSP has engaged members in strategic partnership working supported by seminars and training on partnership working. More work will develop between the Youth Cabinet and members, particularly with the Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Panel.

There has also been partnership work with other local authorities in the Yorkshire & Humber region. As well as attending the network meetings for member development officers, there has been joint commissioning of e-resources and any excess places on courses have been advertised as available to any elected member in the region at a minimal cost. This has resulted in Members from other authorities attending training sessions at Rotherham and vice versa.

Looking Ahead

In order to keep Members up to date with changes in local government either nationally or locally, there are regular information seminars open to all councillors (and officers) on issues of the day eg Lyons Review, Gershon, Rural Strategy etc. These are held three weekly (or more frequently if necessary) on a Tuesday morning.

Overall Evaluation and Developing Best Practice

The Member Development programme has been a very positive experience for all members with constructive and encouraging feedback that is integrated into future training. Local government is a continually changing political landscape in terms of expectations of the community and responsibilities of members. It is important that member training supports members with new skills sets to develop them in their positions as community leaders.

The Council has developed Personal Development Plans for members where any new demands on members can be recognised and catered for. The skills of members are also recorded and their strengths recognised. More experienced and confident Scrutiny members are used as mentors to new members or to co-opted representatives who sit on the Panels. Members have also become involved in the training of co-optees.

Many members have received I.T training so that they now have the use of blackberry palmtops, laptops and access to the internet in their homes and in the members' room at the Eric Manns building.

The member development programme is continually developing and with the rise of new challenges for members new ways of training will need to be supplied. The Council has produced a member handbook (available online, on CD or in hard copy) which provides members with a wealth of information about the Council, and their role, in one place for easy access.

Resources

Member development is managed within the Chief Executive's Office overall by the Head of Member Services and Scrutiny with a part-time member of staff developing, organising and delivering activity. The Council have agreed a budget of £20,000 to support the development, wherever possible other funding is accessed, for example in the past the then ODPM capacity building fund yielded an additional £30,000, followed by RIEP funding.

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