**ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS**

| 1. | Meeting: | MEMBER DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING PANEL |
|----|----------|-------------------------------------|
| 2. | Date: | 10th September 2012 |
| 3. | Title: | Evaluation NEW MEMBER INDUCTION 2012 |
| 4. | Directorate: | Resources |

5. **Summary**

This report gives details of the evaluation of the induction programme for Members elected in May 2012.

6. **Recommendations**

That Members:
a. **receive this report and comment on its contents.**

**7.    Proposals and Details**

A comprehensive induction programme for newly Elected Members was delivered following May's local election. The aim of the induction programme was to help new Members familiarise themselves with the authority and their new role. Following consultation with the MDTP, reference to the Member Development Strategy and feedback from members elected in 2011, the programme covered the following areas:

- Getting to know the Council

- Getting to know your Area

- Getting to know your Role

Out of the twenty-one elected councillors, eleven were new to the Council (or had not been a member for some years).  This is the greatest number of new Councillors in recent years.  Although this presented a very practical challenge to the organisation and delivery of induction and support, particularly in the context of recent staff changes, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Officers from each directorate were involved in the planning and delivery of individual sessions.  The programme was designed and co-ordinated by the Senior Scrutiny Adviser, with assistance from Member's Secretariat.

In order to improve the process for future years, an evaluation was sent to each of the newly elected members (attached as Appendix 1).  Eight of the eleven new members responded (72% response).

The evaluation sought views on:

- How helpful has the induction programme been for new Councillors?

- Comments on individual induction sessions, content and officer input

- How useful was the input from more experienced Councillors?

- How helpful was the member handbook?

- What future training and development sessions are required?

- Timings of training sessions?

- If e-learning packages for Councillors are helpful?

- Is there anything else you think should be included in the current induction programme to help you in your role?

A précis of the responses to each of the questions is detailed below. These comments will be used alongside the broad issues raised in personal development interviews, corporate priorities and other policy changes to inform the Member Development programme.

**7.1** **How helpful has the induction programme been for new Councillors?**



How helpful has the induction programme been for you as a new Councillor (to date)?
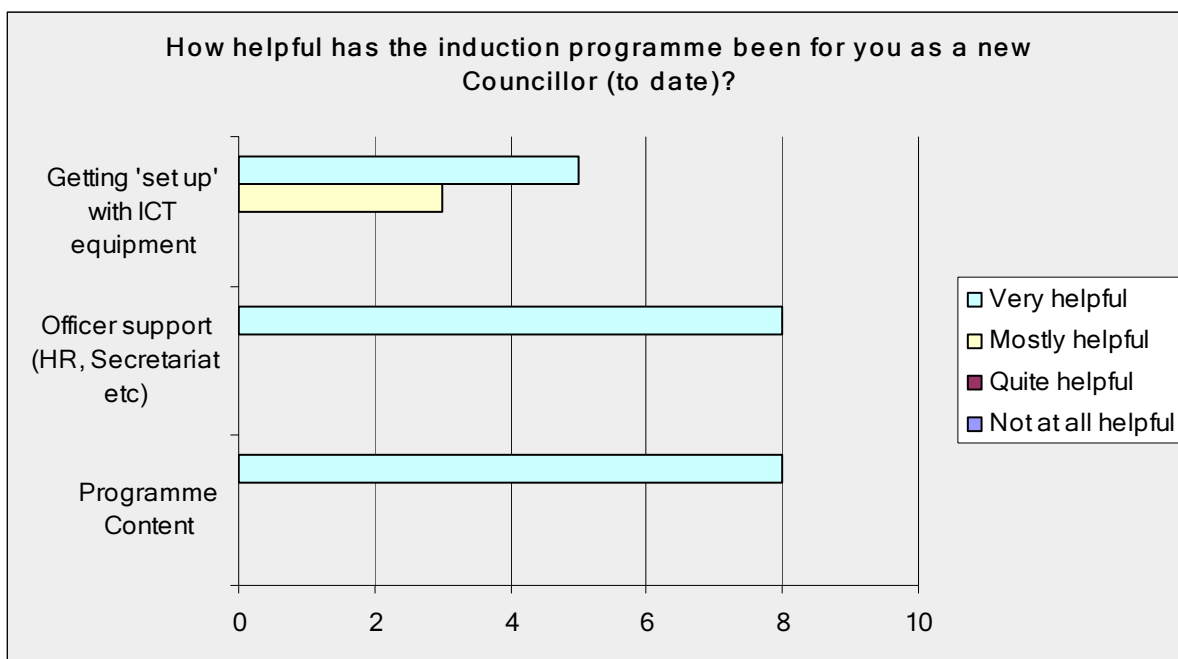
Feedback has been positive, with all comments being in the mostly or very helpful categories.

*"The induction programme was very comprehensive, and more detailed than I was expecting. I can't suggest any areas for improvement as I suspect things about which I would have liked more information were covered in sessions I wasn't able to attend."*

Two comments focussed on specifically on ICT support:

*"ICT should not offer equipment that takes 2 months to provide"*

*"Getting set-up earlier would be great - e.g. IT."*

On the basis of these comments discussions are underway with the ICT Manager on how the provision of equipment and support can be improved. Comments from Secretariat have also been sought as they have been directly involved in co-ordinating equipment and addressing members queries.

**7.2** **Comments on individual induction sessions, content and officer input**

Further feedback was sought on each of the sessions, their length, content and officer input. Not all members were able to attend each session or responded to the evaluation questionnaire, therefore the response column may not accurately reflect actual attendance (for example 11 attended the welcome and introduction session but only 8 have indicated they were present).

Feedback on each of the sessions was positive with the overwhelming number of comments falling into the 'good' or 'very good' categories; none of the sessions received a 'poor' mark. Early feedback from a number of members requested that

additional evening sessions be put on to accommodate those members with day-time or working commitments. The programme was altered accordingly.

Each respondent was given an option of providing further comments on the sessions. These include:

*"I thought that it was a well put together programme. I missed some due to work and a couple due to other commitments, but enjoyed the ones I went to."*

*"I found the IT handouts quite difficult to follow (a reflection on me I think), but Jean Tracey's one to one session was excellent, and I am now more confident with e-casework etc. Generally speaking though, the handouts provided a valuable resource which will be useful for future reference."*

*"Was unable to attend the last few sessions… hence it would be useful if any could be repeated especially the session on Local Government Finance. I thought the session involving meeting the Leadership Team/Directors was very useful but too rushed to take it all in. Maybe this could be broken into 2 separate sessions in the future so that not all directorates are there at the same time."*

| | Response | Session Length | | Content | Handouts (if provided) | Officer input |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Too short | Just right | Good or Very Good | Good or Very good | Good or Very good |
| Welcome and introduction | 8 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Finding your feet as councillors | 4 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Getting the Most from IT | 7 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Tour of Riverside House | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Meet SLT | 6 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| How the Council Works | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Managing your Casework | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Health and Safety | 5 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 3 (with 1 average) | 3 (with 1 average) |
| Introduction to Planning | 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 (with 2 average) | 5 | 5 |
| Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny | 6 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Safeguarding | 4 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Corporate Parenting | 3 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Time Management | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Charing Skills | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Knowing Your Ward | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 (1 average) | 1 | 1 |
| Local Government Finance Made Simple | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 |

It should be noted that all sessions were open to all members: Corporate Parenting, Safeguarding and Chairing Skills sessions were attended by both newly elected and more established members. The feedback from more established members has not been included in this evaluation.

Attendance was low at a number of sessions (for example time management and Knowing Your Ward), although often greater numbers had given prior indication that they would be able to attend. Where it was clear that numbers were not sufficient to make the course viable, sessions were cancelled and members notified accordingly. It has not been possible to ascertain whether poor attendance signified lack of interest in the subject matter (although anecdotally a number of members have said that time management would be helpful) or if the date and times were inconvenient.

In order to remedy this, more detailed descriptions of sessions will be provided in future programmes so members are aware of content and relevance. In addition, members will be asked to specify which sessions they will be attending in advance, so in case of low numbers cancellations can be made in good time as necessary.

**7.3     How useful was the input from more experienced Councillors?**

As with previous years, the programme included input from more experienced councillors, to ensure that their perspective and knowledge are reflected and communicated. All respondents commented favourably on this input, with half (4) stating that it was "very useful".

Specific comments include:

*"Always good to hear how others do things"*

*"It's always good to know whose brain you are able to pick, but.... more experienced councillors could have warned us about a) common pitfalls in the first few months and b) the fact that we were likely to be targeted by individuals who had already approached councillors but not received the response they were looking for. It would have been helpful to have been given some details about the ward "awkward squad", and reassured that every ward has one!"*

*"They have a wealth of experience and it is important for new members to learn from them. Some sessions, especially the one about 'How the Council Works' by Cllr Lakin was especially good as was the session about the role of the Mayor"*

These comments will be used when briefing members about the content of their sessions for future programmes.

**7.4     How helpful was the member handbook?**

All newly Elected Members received an induction pack after the election, including a member handbook. This provided information on the day to day running of the Council, the support services available and contact details of support staff. In addition, members were supplied with a copy of the Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) Guide for New Councillors.

Substantial amendments were made to the member handbook to make sure that the information reflected up-to-date organisational structures and Council priorities.  The production of the handbook was made in-house to ensure that costs were kept to a minimal.

All responses were positive with seven (out of eight) responding that the handbook was "helpful".

Comments include:
*"I read this cover to cover and felt that it explained a lot"*

**7.5     What future training and development sessions are required?**

As not all members were able to attend each session, a number of repeat sessions have been requested.  These include: Local Government Finance Made Simple, Meet SLT and Corporate Parenting. These will be scheduled into the Autumn programme.

In addition, new member's views were sought on what additional development would be helpful.  Their responses are captured below:

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction to Licensing | 2 |
| Localism Act - overview | 8 (100%) |
| Localism Act - implications for ward councillors | 8 (100%) |
| Understanding Council priorities | 6 |
| Health and well-being agenda | 5 |
| Deprivation: the Rotherham picture | 7 |
| Speaking off the cuff | 4 |
| Questioning skills for scrutiny | 8 (100%) |
| Equality and cohesion (Equality Act 2010) | 5 |
| Speaking to the media | 4 |
| Emergency planning - your role as a councillor | 6 |

Other comments on training and development needs include:

*"I think I would benefit from more IT training but appreciate that I can ask for this separately"*

*"I would particularly appreciate sessions on 'Understanding Council Priorities' , the Localism Act and Deprivation"*

*"I would appreciate a session on council housing allocation policy and the role of Key Choices"*

Sessions are being planned on each of the areas outlined.  Some of these may entail briefing sessions between officers and members on particular issues or subjects, or may feature as part of the scheduled Member Seminars.  Where

members have identified an ICT development need, they have been referred to the relevant HR officer.

**7.6** **Timings of training sessions**

As indicated earlier, a number of members had a very strong preference for evening sessions to accommodate their working commitments. By the same token, a small number of respondents stated that evening training sessions were not convenient. The majority expressed no preference. In order to accommodate working members, every effort will be made to schedule alternative sessions in the early evening. However, if external facilitators are involved this may not always be possible to accommodate.

**7.7** **If e-learning packages for Councillors are helpful?**

In line with the blended approach to development adopted by the MDTP, members were asked if they were interested in accessing e-learning packages at their own pace and at a convenient time. All respondents responded positively to the question and will be contacted shortly.

An HR Officer with specific responsibility for learning and development has delivered one-to-one sessions with a number of new members to familiarise them with e-casework and other ICT systems. Feedback on her input has been very positive (see comments above). As part of the e-learning package, bespoke support will be offered to ensure that members are confident accessing modules.

**7.8** **Is there anything else you think should be included in the current induction programme to help you in your role?**

No specific comments were received other than the following:

*"Not really, but I would like to thank everyone involved in the programme."*

*"No - it has been very good - and probably about the right pace. The evening sessions made it easier to attend."*

**7.9** **Additional Comments**

In addition to the comments highlighted above, Member's Secretariat has also identified areas for improvement in relation to the following:

- clear guidance on options for ICT equipment
- changes to the information required on the New Members form in relation to car parking passes and other personal details
- issuing ID badges
- arranging an early session with officers from HR to outline tax arrangements, together with South Yorkshire Pensions Applications.
- creation of new webpage for each new Member and deleting pages of former members.

Action is being taken to address these points.

**8. Finance**

The cost of running the induction programme was met through the Member Development budget. All of the sessions were delivered by officers in-house, with the exception of chairing skills, which was delivered by a Local Government Association Member Peer (this session was a pilot of new materials so did not incur any cost to the authority).

**9. Risks and Uncertainties**

If there is no induction programme, new Members will have to learn their way round the council by 'trial and error'. Induction will allow Members to make an early contribution to the work of the council and so represent their local communities more effectively.

**10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Ensuring that newly elected members are briefed and equipped to carry out their important democratic and community roles is no easy task. But it is one that needs to be carried out effectively if we are to build the skills and capacity of Members as part of our corporate priorities.

**11. Background Papers and Consultation**

Member Development Strategy (2011)
Questionnaire to each of the new members


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