

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	MEMBER DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING PANEL
2. Date:	10th September 2012
3. Title:	Proposals for media skills and awareness training
4. Directorate:	Resources

5. Summary

The report sets out proposals for media skills and awareness training as part of a wider member development programme .

6. Recommendations

- a. That Members receive this report and comment on the proposals set out in Section 7.1**

7. Proposals and Details

Many Members during their PDP interviews have expressed a want to undertake media training. Since the last organised training in 2007, several key factors have changed. These include:

- a high turnover of members, with eighteen new members elected since 2011;
- rapidly changing communication developments in social media, blogging etc;
- Government proposals to develop local television stations, with Sheffield being amongst the cities identified to host such a service. Should this go ahead it is likely that interest will also extend to the sub-region, with an increasing focus on Councils and other service deliverers;
- The Department for Communities and Local Government has recently announced that new regulations have been put before Parliament, coming into force in September, to extend the rights of people to attend all meetings of a council's executive, its committees and subcommittees. The existing media definition will be broadened to cover organisations that provide internet news thereby opening up councils to local online news outlets.

Given that Councils have to deal with increasingly difficult decisions about resource allocation and service priorities, it is likely that the media (and 'citizen journalist') will only continue to seek interviews to understand how these decisions are made. It is important therefore that Members are aware of Council protocols and confident with techniques for communicating with the public and dealing with the media.

It is also important for the Authority to take every opportunity to publicise where, despite the current economic climate, excellent services are still being delivered and to demonstrate where good practice, success and positive outcomes continue to be achieved for local communities.

7.1 To support this, it is proposed that a three tiered approach is taken:

Tier One: this is a generic awareness raising session aimed at all members (particularly newly elected members). This will outline how to handle press enquiries, Council protocols and some basic – do's and don'ts of social media. Approximate length: one hour, potential format in style of member seminar.

Tier Two: this will focus more on radio interviews or media contacts that are not held face to face. It is aimed at councillors who have occasional contact with the media (such as scrutiny chairs or area assembly chairs). You will practice being an interviewee presenting council topics or news items (for example a scrutiny review or community event). You will learn what the

media want from you and the types of story surrounding their 'agenda'. You will practice how and how not to answer the questions whilst making the most of what you have to say. Approximate length: half day. Numbers attending: eight.

Tier Three: this workshop will a range of relevant interview practice scenarios, based on real "live" issues. Course content should cover how to approach local press, radio and TV interview opportunities with confidence; simple preparation formulae and key communication and personal presentation skills. Practice elements to include live interview examples, group discussion, working in pairs and individual role-play exercises. This is aimed at senior members whose role may demand regular contact with the media or are delivering key messages about resource allocation or services. Approximate length: half day. Numbers attending: six.

Tiers one and two can be delivered in-house at a minimal cost, with repeat sessions if required. However, the advice from the Communications and Media team is that tier three is best delivered by an external provider (based on previous experiences) to provide access to specialist equipment and to simulate the media environment of being interviewed by "non-officers". Quotes are therefore being sought for this workshop. It is anticipated that it would be most cost effective if six members commit to this programme, with an estimated cost of up £125 per person

8. Finance

The cost of running these programmes will be met through the Member Development budget.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The Member Development Programme should equip councillors with the skills to meet the challenges and changes in Local Government and communicate them effectively to the public and the media. Failure to do so may impact negatively on public perception and the Council's reputation.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Ensuring that 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)
Personal Development interviews

Contact: Caroline Webb, Senior Scrutiny Adviser (01709) 822765
caroline.webb@rotherham.gov.uk
Tracey Holmes, Communications and Media Manager