

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	MEMBER DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING PANEL
2. Date:	10th June 2013
3. Title:	Member Development: Summary of Activity 2012-13
4. Directorate:	Resources

5. Summary

This report provides an overview of activity in respect of Member Development over the previous municipal year.

6. Recommendations

That Members:

- a. Note the report and its contents**

7. Proposals and Details

Summary of activities 2012-13

This report gives an overview of activity over the period of the 2012-13 Municipal Year. Member development is overseen by the Member Development and Training Panel, chaired by the Deputy Leader, Cllr Akhtar.

The report details the induction programme which featured prominently from May through to the summer recess. From that point forward, the programme was based on local priorities as identified in the Council's corporate plan and Members individual skills and development needs identified in the personal development planning process.

The overwhelming majority of Members (59 out of 63) have accessed at least one organised development or learning activity over the 2012-13 period¹ (not including attendance at seminars or other external events). Of these, 29 Members attended four or more sessions, demonstrating the commitment of RMBC Members to ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to undertake their roles effectively.

The programme has incorporated a blended approach to Member Development, using a variety of methods of delivery, including bespoke training, e-learning and use of the Member Seminar Programme. This was intended to suit the needs of different learners, as well as make learning more accessible to Members.

The report also details other developments such as regional/sub-regional working; development of the Member's learning and development site along with the Skills Profile and Learning Resource Guide.

7.1 Induction

The focus of the Member Development Programme following the 2012 election was on the induction of new members.

The aim of the comprehensive 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

¹ please note: there is a caveat to this inasmuch as we only began to electronically record information from September 2012 – potentially more members may have accessed a session and their attendance has not been captured

recent staff changes, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Based on input from MTDP and feedback from Members elected in 2011, the programme covered the following areas:

- Meet the Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team/Directors
- How the Council Works
- Understanding Overview and Scrutiny
- The Councillors' Code of Conduct and new standards
- Introduction to Planning
- Knowing your Ward
- "What I wish I'd known when first elected..." Learning the ropes – your role as a councillor
- Safeguarding
- Corporate Parenting - The councillor's key role as a corporate parent
- Working with the media
- Local Government finance made simple
- Getting the Most from IT: Emails to Facebook:
- Managing your Casework:
- Emergency Planning (deferred because of low attendance)
- Health and Safety – Personal Safety for Councillors:

Attendance at session was good with an average of 6 members attending each session. Where members were unable to attend, this was generally due to existing work or other commitments. When it was clear that numbers were not sufficient to make the course viable, sessions were cancelled and members notified accordingly.

A number of members had a very strong preference for evening sessions to accommodate their working commitments. In order to accommodate working members, alternative sessions were organized in the early evening. This practice has been built into other programmes. However, if external facilitators are involved this may not always be possible to accommodate.

7.1.1 Evaluation:

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 were evaluated as 'poor'.

Every attempt was made to involve more established Members in the delivery of sessions to ensure that their perspective and knowledge are reflected and communicated. All respondents commented favourably on this input, with half of respondents 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..."

"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"

Although feedback was sought on attendance and an evaluation was made of content/delivery, a formal evaluation of the *impact* of the induction programme has not taken place. The views of Members elected in 2012 on its impact will be sought as part of the PDP process. However, for future induction programmes a more reflective evaluation will be built in as part of the process.

7.2 **Generic Programme.**

A generic programme of activity was developed, covering core responsibilities such as Emergency Planning and Corporate Parenting, along with sessions designed to raise awareness of the impact of policy changes on the Council and local communities.

- Deprivation – The Rotherham Picture, Understanding Ward Data
- Welfare Reform: Dealing Effectively with Casework
- Localism Act
- Introduction to Local Government Finance
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Countering Child Sexual Exploitation
- New Standards 2012
- Corporate Parenting
- Media Awareness & Skills

Five sessions were organised using external facilitation

- Chairing Skills
- Questioning Skills for Scrutiny
- Media Awareness and Skills (interview skills)
- Faster Reading Training
- Emergency Planning for Members

Attendance at the all sessions has been on-the-whole good, however on occasions in-house sessions have gone ahead with very low numbers after members who have committed to attend, did not turned up. This has an impact on the quality of the session as it limits the discussion. It is also not a viable use of officer time.

7.2.1 Evaluation

All sessions are evaluated after delivery, although inevitably not all participants complete or return evaluation sheets. However, a good proportion have been returned and therefore, a judgement can be made about how the training has been received.

The evaluation asks for information on the following areas:

- Useful Areas:
- Session length
- Describe to colleague
- Improvement to Knowledge (1 = little, 5 = lot)
- How they will use the knowledge
- Additional areas to include for future session

All participants found areas of the training useful. Several of the sessions had skills practice or role-play built into the sessions and where these were offered, participants responded favourably.

Most of the sessions are two-hours in length although externally provided sessions are often a half-day. The majority of participants have responded that sessions are 'just right'. With this in mind, most in-house sessions will aim to be up-to-two hours long. However, in order to maximise learning with external provision, it is unlikely that session will be able to fit into the shorter timeframe.

Many of the participants responded enthusiastically to the question "how would you describe this session to a colleague?" A sample of responses is reflected below:

Deprivation: the Rotherham Picture:	<i>Very good, it's clearer now how to understand the issues</i>
Welfare Reform – Dealing with Casework:	<i>Very important to get the information; Essential training for all councillors given caseloads relating to this issue.</i>
Localism Act	<i>The presentation was pitched just right...</i>
Introduction to Local Government Finance	<i>A must to understanding finance; very informative and useful</i>
Public Sector Equality Duty	<i>Very helpful, informative and good opportunity to discuss</i>
Countering Child Sexual Exploitation	<i>Good explanation of the issues and current ways of working; very informative a must to attend</i>
Corporate Parenting	<i>Good overview and valuable; essential</i>
Media Communication Skills:	<i>Very useful although a little nerve wracking</i>
Questioning Skills for Scrutiny	<i>Good planning questions; Makes you think about how you prepare for meetings to get the best out of people</i>
Faster Reading Training	<i>Good – a need for all new councillors and old; fascinating insight into improving a key skill</i>

Emergency Planning for Members	<i>Really interesting and informative; worthwhile; thought provoking</i>
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Feedback on all sessions has been positive. Most respondents indicated that the sessions had at the minimum, consolidated existing knowledge, with many indicating that they had learned a 'lot'. Although the evaluation asks how the Member will put the learning into practice, there has been little formal evaluation of how whether it has had an impact. There is scope however, for this to be analysed as part of the PDP process, asking members to reflect on any development opportunities to see if it has made a difference to their role, knowledge base or skills.

7.3 **ICT training**

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

In addition to the scheduled programme, Members have recently been offered the use of iPads and in order to maximise the effective usage of tablets, each Member has been contacted to discuss their individual learning needs, with bespoke one-to-one or group support provided as necessary.

7.4 **Planning and Licensing**

In addition to the sessions organised through the central Member Development function, both Planning and Licensing officers have scheduled regular in-depth training and briefing on changes to policy or legislation for Members on the Licensing and Planning Committees. This activity is not captured in this report.

7.5 **Leadership**

As with previous years, every effort is made to support members in their leadership roles by meeting their specific training needs (for example Leadership Academy or bespoke programmes). As greater expense is usually attached to these courses, we have maximised attendance at the LGA's Leadership Academy through its free places scheme.

Two newly elected Members attended the Young Members Leadership Academy with the Cabinet Members for Children, Young People and Families attended the Children Services programme, whilst the Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism attended the Sports programme.

The learning and wider benefits to the organisation will be analysed through the personal development programme.

7.6 Regional and sub-regional working

Officers are part of strong Member Development Officer Network in South Yorkshire and across the wider Yorkshire and Humber region. As part of this we are developing a number of shared, sustainable resources which can be used and adapted by each Council. These are available via the Learning and Development intranet page.

In addition, officers are keen to share good practice and knowledge with other authorities, and to maximise value for money, share resources wherever appropriate. For examples places have were offered to South Yorkshire Joint Secretariat on the recent Faster Reading Skills course on a reciprocal basis and Social Media: Community Leadership. .

Discussions are also underway at a sub-regional level to utilize the training expertise of LGiU to deliver sessions locally. In addition, a number of free national and regional events are also being arranged through Local Government Yorkshire and Humber and the Local Government Association. Details have been shared with Members on an 'as and when' basis. These courses provide a value for money option as travel and joining costs are kept to a minimum.

Other resources have been developed including the Member Online Resource Environment, (M.O.R.E) website. This is a resource listing events, news, information and development opportunities as well as a space to network and share ideas and good practice with other members in the Yorkshire and Humber Region.

Although several members requested e-learning options, there appears to be little take-up of this facility although there are extensive resources available via the learning and development site.

7.7 Seminars

The Seminar programme is an important part of development programme. The contents of seminars are suggested by Members and are usually chaired by the relevant Cabinet Member. As can be shown below, a wide range of issues have been covered over the previous 12 months. Records of attendance are kept by Democratic Services, although the seminars are usually scheduled immediately preceding or following major meetings to maximise participation.

- Changes to the Right to Buy Policy
- Housing Strategy and Policy Consultation
- Waste update - Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham Waste PFI
- Media Awareness - 'Minimising the Drama'
- Bike IT!: Cycle training in schools
- Welfare Reform and Changes to the Benefit System
- Warm Homes - Healthy People and Rotherham's Affordable Warmth Strategy
- Lessons Learned from the Child S Serious Case Review
- Local Government Settlement

- Emergency Planning
- Connect to Support Rotherham - website Demonstration
- Highways Agency - Managed Motorways Programme
- Unscheduled Care Review
- Budget: meeting the financial challenge 2013/14 and beyond
- Members' Skills Profile: - Learning Resource Guide and Learning and Development Intranet Site
- Environment and Climate Change Strategy.
- Sexual Health Agenda.
- Welfare Reform and Local Welfare Provision - The Rotherham Fund for Change
- Tram-Train: Sheffield - Rotherham – Parkgate
- The Francis Report.

7.8 Other developments

The panel agreed earlier in the year that work be undertaken to develop a self reflective learning toolkit as a means of identifying the key skills required for the role and those needing development. Using the LGA's Political Skills Framework as a basis, a Member working group developed a streamlined RMBC Members Skills Profile with the intention of being used as part of the PDP process as a self assessment tool to identify any areas for development.

It asks each Member to reflect on the key skills and knowledge required to undertake their role; pointing to areas of expertise or required development. Areas of expertise could be shared by peer mentoring, whilst the identified areas of development would be addressed via the member development programme.

The Members Learning and Development site has also been developed and the Skills Profile and Learning Resource Guide incorporated on the site. Bringing these resources together for the first time, the site also includes links to other relevant documents such as the Members Handbook, training calendar and links to useful website such as MORE. The site is also fully accessible on the Council's intranet which can be accessed by Members on their Council laptops (when logged in) or via the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) network.

8. Finance

All activity is funded through the Member Development and Training Budget. The majority of development sessions are offered in-house, however if specialist skills or equipment are required, an external provider may be sought. The budget is monitored regularly and depending on the level of demand or emerging needs, a further reprioritisation of resources by MTDP may need to take place.

In order to balance competing needs and make best use of the budget, MTDP agreed some guiding principles for the approval of individual training requests which incur a cost (either course cost or travelling):

- The development need should have been identified previously in a Members PDP OR be in an area that is subject to continuous change which the Member needs to be kept up to date in
- There should be no repetition of learning from a previous event attended
- It should be confirmed that the learning cannot be achieved by other no (or lower) cost means
- The event/session/programme should include a high proportion of actual learning.

The application of these principles will be taken through the PDP process. This will ensure that a consistent approach is taken to training requests.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The Member Development Strategy aims to train and equip Rotherham MBC Members to take on the duties of the modern local councillor. Failure to put a comprehensive programme in place may limit the opportunity for councillors to develop their abilities and skills, which will in the long term, impact negatively on the effectiveness of the Council as a whole.

The Member Development function is supported by officers based in Scrutiny Services, with support from HR and Member's Secretariat. Although it is a small team of officers working across different sections, it has worked effectively to organise and administer an ambitious programme. However, it has limited capacity to respond to additional pressures. Should these occur, the programme or activities may need to be changed accordingly.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Local government has faced unprecedented change in recent years. The member development programme should assist Members to understand the implications of these changes and their impact on the Council and wider borough.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Member Development Strategy (2011)
 Personal Development Interviews
 Member Development Programme:
 Member Development and Training Panel Minutes

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