
Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Scrutiny Board (Central & Corporate Functions)

Date: 2nd December 2008

Subject: Member Development Inquiry – Session 1 – Setting the Scene.

Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity ☐

Community Cohesion ☐

Narrowing the Gap ☐

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Terms of reference for this Inquiry were agreed at the Board's meeting on 8th September 2008. These are attached as Appendix 1. Members agreed that this first session of the Inquiry would be used to 'set the scene'.
- 1.2 It is recognised that some Members of the Board may not be familiar with some of the key statistics or be aware of the scope of the Member Development activity undertaken. To address this, some background papers have been supplied for information, and this report will set the scene by providing a summary of activity and key issues from the past few years.
- 1.3 At today's session Members will receive a brief presentation from Kay Sidebottom, Member Development Officer, and a paper from Cllr Gruen. Following this presentation the Board will have the opportunity to consider areas where it would like to focus and who it would like to hear from in order to 'flesh out' best practice and initiatives for the future.

2.0 SETTING THE SCENE – MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

2.1 In the beginning...

Training and development activities for elected Members have always taken place at Leeds. However, the implementation of the Local Government Act 2000 meant that councillors were facing new pressures and challenges. In October 2000, the Council (through the leaders of all three main political parties) signed up to the Local Government Information Unit's (LGiU) Councillor Development Charter and the Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) Charter on Member Development. In December 2003 the Council appointed a Member Development Officer whose

remit was to devise a specific learning and development strategy for elected Members, which would bring the principles of these charters to life.

2.2 Early days...

The first Member Development Strategy was launched in April 2004, in readiness for the all-out elections that year. The focus of the strategy was on the following areas:

- Delivering effective induction
- Encouraging role-specific development (eg for Planning or Licensing Members)
- Provision of a wide-ranging series of briefings and seminars
- Meeting the personal development needs of individual Members.

For the rest of that year and into 2005, the Member Development Officer continued to roll out the objectives of the Strategy, and a comprehensive events programme was put in place.

2.3 Where next?

Although a popular events programme was in place, there was a growing sense that a large proportion of Members across all groups were not fully engaged with the Member Development process. Part of this issue concerned the level at which Members were involved in developing learning and development solutions, and the extent to which they felt they owned the Member Development process.

The decision-making panel dealing with Member learning and development issues is the Member Management Committee. As the group only meets on a quarterly-basis, and deals with a wide-range of issues, it was felt that it could not give detailed enough consideration of Member development topics. A proposal was put to the Group to form a Working Group of Members who could focus purely on Member Development, and formulate recommendations which could go back to Member Management Committee for approval.

The Working Group was duly formed, and consisted of one Member (a deputy Whip) from each of the 4 main parties. The Working Group held its first meeting on 19th December 2005 and meetings have continued regularly since that date. The Group is currently chaired by Cllr Graham Latty; other members of the Group are councillors Bentley, Ann Blackburn and Dowson. Other political groups and independent Members are kept updated via regular reports and emails on Member Development activity.

2.4 Attaining the Member Development Charter

A new Charter for Member Development was put together by the IDeA and launched in 2005. The Charter aims to promote best practice in Member training and development and is based on the Investors in People national quality standard. It provides a systematic framework for the development of elected Members, and requires councils to demonstrate evidence of commitment to the following principles:

- being fully committed to developing elected Members in order to achieve the council's aims and objectives
- a Member led, strategic approach to elected Member development
- a Member learning and development plan that clearly identifies the difference development activities will make
- a recognition that learning and development is effective in building capacity
- a commitment to wider development matters which promote work-life balance and citizenship.

By November 2006, the Working Group felt that sufficient evidence had been gathered in order to present the Council for assessment, and the Leader of each political group demonstrated their commitment by signing up to its principles. In February 2007, the Council was formally assessed and awarded the Charter: a formal presentation was made at Full Council by representatives of Local Government Yorkshire and Humber in April 2007.

2.5 **The present day**

Many of the activities which commenced in 2004 (induction; personal development planning; regular learning events) are still in place and the Working Group continues to provide an effective steer for Member Development.

A new Member Development Strategy for 2008-11 was launched in September 2008, and is linked closely to the following strategic themes:

- the Council's objectives, as outlined in the Business and Strategic Plans
- the five themes of the Member Development Charter, and actions arising from the Charter assessment report
- national good practice guidelines as recommended by bodies such as the Improvement and Development Agency.

The Strategy sets out a number of specific actions and performance measures relating to the themes. These will be monitored closely by the Working Group.

A number of new features have been introduced into the 2008-9 learning and development programme. These include:

- University study. Six councillors are taking part in the University of Huddersfield Postgraduate Certificate in Local Government Modernisation.
- Mentoring. Three councillors have been provided with mentors (IDeA-appointed Member peers, who are senior and experienced councillors from large authorities).
- Leadership Academy. Two councillors attended the IDeA Academy in 2008.
- Regional events. Leeds has hosted one regional and one national Scrutiny event, both in conjunction with the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

2.6 **Issues and challenges**

The Member Development Charter will be reassessed in 2010, and Leeds has the option of going for a more stringent award; CharterPlus. If we decide to commit to this award, we will need to evidence real improvement in all the key areas, and meet a number of new criteria. The following areas will be key to the achievement of CharterPlus, and the future success of the function as a whole:

- Member Engagement. A majority of councillors must be shown to have undertaken interviews as part of a formal personal development planning

process, and the majority of Members must be seen to engage with learning and development in some form

- Member's roles are clearly set out. Role descriptions must be in place for each councillor role (such as Scrutiny Chair, Executive Member etc). This document should outline knowledge and skill requirements and make links to personal development and the Council's priorities.
- Ownership of Member Development. Evidence of Members setting and prioritising the budget for Member Development must be seen, and steering groups such as the Member Development Working Group must continue to lead the function.
- Investment in learning is evaluated in terms of benefits and impact. This should include the assessment of the impact of learning and development at community level (eg by asking for feedback from partners or via a 360-degree feedback process), and undertaking exit interviews with councillors who leave mid-term or who do not seek re-election.
- Support for Members. Evidence of Member Development addressing work-life balance should be demonstrated (through the provision of evening events and flexible learning options), and promotion of the councillor role to individuals and communities.

3.0 NEXT STEPS IN THE INQUIRY

- 3.1 Due to time constraints, and the workload of the Board, it is proposed to progress the rest of the inquiry through a working group. The group will look at areas such as best practice, performance, and future initiatives/developments, in addition to any topics arising from this meeting.
- 3.2 A final report will be brought back to the Board in March 2009.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Members are asked to:
- (i) Note the agreed terms of reference at Appendix 1
 - (ii) Receive the officer presentation
 - (iii) Discuss any subsequent issues
 - (iv) Agree the inquiry programme.

Background papers

- Member Development Strategy 2008 to 2011 (extract)
- Benchmarking statistics for local authority spend on Member Development
- Member Development and conference budgets for 2008-9
- Events and attendance summary for the year 2008-9 to date.