

# **Member Development Scrutiny Inquiry Report**

# Introduction and Scope



## Introduction

1. 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 three main political groups) 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. This culminated in the Council being awarded the Improvement and Development Agency's 'Charter for Member Development' in 2007.
2. This award recognised the Council's commitment in supporting its Members to fulfil their roles and build capacity. However, whilst acknowledging the quality and effectiveness of Leeds' provision, the external assessors stressed the importance of continuous improvement. Their report made a number of suggestions, including the recommendation to undertake a Scrutiny review of Member Development.

## Scope of the inquiry

3. We agreed to focus our inquiry on making an assessment of and,

where appropriate, recommendations on the following areas:

- Extent to which Member Development is Member-led;
- Provision of resources and budget to support the function;
- Effectiveness of the Member Development Strategy and existing training provision for Members;
- The Council's ability to gain CharterPlus

# Evidence



## Conclusions and Recommendations

### The extent to which Member Development is Member-led

- 1 The first Member Development Strategy was launched in April 2004. The focus of the Strategy was on the following areas:
  - Delivering effective induction;
  - Encouraging role-specific development (e.g. for Planning or Licensing Members);
  - Provision of a wide-ranging series of briefings and seminars;
  - Meeting the personal development needs of individual Members.
- 2 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.
- 3 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. This prompted discussion around the level at which Members themselves were influencing learning and development solutions and also ownership of the Member Development process.
- 4 One of the key obligations required of an authority when aspiring to obtain the Member Development Charter was the commitment to the principle of a Member led, strategic approach to elected Member development.
- 5 In late 2005, the Member Management Committee established a Working Group of Members with a remit to focus purely on Member Development and formulate recommendations back to Member Management Committee for endorsement. The Member Development Working Group was duly formed, and consisted of one Member (a deputy Whip) from each of the 4 main political groups. The Member Development Working Group held its first meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2005 and meetings have continued regularly since that date. The Group is currently chaired by Cllr Graham Latty and includes Councillors Bentley, Ann Blackburn and Dowson. Other political groups and independent Members are kept updated via regular reports and emails from the Member Development Officer on Member Development activity.
- 6 The establishment of the Member Development Working Group has shown a willingness to work together across political boundaries to improve the skills, knowledge and understanding of Councillors.

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- 7 We consider the Group to be working extremely well and acknowledge its role in shaping the current Member Development Strategy and the influence it has on Member development activities. It is our view that this very successful partnership between the Member Development Working Group and the Member Development Officer should be maintained and nurtured.

indicates a substantial resource investment in, and for, the ongoing support for Member Development, which is viewed as a key 'strand' of the Corporate Improvement Plan. In addition to the staffing budget the Council allocates an annual budget of £7,590 to purchase learning activities and materials.

## Provision of resources and budget to support the function

- 8 The creation of a dedicated Member Development Officer post and administrative support

- 9 The table below shows a comparison of local authority spend on Member Development (*excluding staffing costs*):

### Core Cities

Core City	£ pa (in 000s)	No. Cllrs	Av. Spend per head (£)
Birmingham	£10	120	£83
Bristol	£52	70	£743
<b>Leeds</b>	<b>£7.5</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>£76</b>
Liverpool	Under review	90	
Manchester	Under review	96	
Newcastle	£70	69	£1014
Nottingham	£16	55	£290
Sheffield	£40	84	£488

### West Yorkshire Authorities

Authority	£ pa (in 000s)	No. Cllrs	Av. Spend per head (£)
Bradford	£30*	89	£337
Calderdale	£30	51	£588
Kirklees	£8	69	£116
Wakefield	£22**	63	£350
<b>Leeds</b>	<b>£7.5</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>£76</b>

\* provisional sum for 2009-2010. Budget previously split by political group.

\*\*includes conferences

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10 We acknowledge that the Leeds figure does not explain the full picture. The majority of learning and development activities are sourced in-house, through officers within Democratic Services or other service areas. The annual lunchtime seminar programme for example is almost exclusively funded by service areas. We were told that a crude calculation of the amount of development members receive 'in kind' from Directorates, that is not funded directly from the Member Development budget, would be in the region of £5,000.

11 While this comparison demonstrates the cost- benefits and extent to which learning and development activities can be provided in-house, it does not account for the fact that internal officers, while skilled in their field of expertise, are generally not 'trainers' and therefore not subject to the quality checks and evaluation regimes of professionally qualified trainers. The other benefits of using external trainers include: opportunity for challenge, objectivity and the chance for Members to learn from other organisations (both private sector and local government).

12 Whilst there may be a case for providing more external support we acknowledge that this would not be realistic in the current economic climate. ***We are therefore happy with the resource allocation***

## ***given to Member Development.***

Indeed we consider the amount of spend per councillor as positive, indicative of the value for money received and something in which we should be congratulated. However the Council needs to provide more training and support to officers who deliver in-house learning and development activities to Members so that such activities are interactive, engaging and cater for a Member audience. We recommend therefore that the

### **Recommendation 1**

**That the Member Development Officer discusses with Directors how training and support mechanisms for officers delivering learning and development activities for Members could be developed.**

Member Development Officer discusses with Directors how such training and support mechanisms could be developed.

### Effectiveness of the Member Development Strategy and existing training provision

13 In our view, two key indicators measure the success of the Member Development function. The first is the level of take up by Members in learning and development activities. The

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second is the return of investment in terms of Member improvement .

14 The data we were presented with was impressive in terms of, variety of topics covered and learning methods employed. However, it is apparent that there is disengagement by a small number of Members from the whole Member development process. We were advised by Mike Leitch, former Head of Service (Learning & Consultancy) - Local Government Yorkshire and Humber, that this problem is common in every local authority assessed against the Charter standard, and one quite difficult to change. The reasons given for this lack of attendance included constraints on an individual's availability due to work and family commitments and, on occasion, the unwillingness to admit that engagement in targeted development activity might improve individual performance.

15 An analysis of attendance at learning and development events during 2007-2008 show the following trends:

- 20% of elected Members were highly engaged with Member Development activities in 2007-8, attending two or more events per month;
- 16% of elected Members did not attend any learning and development events in 2007-8;

- Of the 16 Members considered to be relatively disengaged with the Member development process, 6 were Labour, 5 were Liberal Democrat, 4 were Conservative and 1 was from another political group.

- Further analysis of the 'disengaged' group has shown that the majority are long-serving Members, often in senior roles in Council or within their political group.

- Only 20 Members completed a Personal Development Plan in 2007-8.

16 Statistics for 2008-9 show similar trends, although the Personal Development Plan process (which is currently underway) has shown a better return so far.

17 We discussed the reasons why learning and training does not feature high on some Members agenda and how the Council could raise levels of interest and engagement.

18 Our first consideration was around practicalities. We discussed whether there were too many events. We acknowledge that in the past this might have been the case. However, the Member Development Working Group has worked hard on reducing these and

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developing a programme which is relevant and focused. We are confident that there is now Member input to the learning programme. In particular, seminars reflect what Members want and not what officers consider is needed. This has undoubtedly improved Member buy in.

19 We recognise that the format of events is difficult to get right for everyone. We acknowledge for example that the Labour Group would prefer presentations and briefings as part of their group meetings. Our view on this is that while there is some merit in offering events within groups, it is vital to run the majority of learning on a cross party basis. This approach helps to achieve economies of scale and allows Members to learn together in an apolitical environment. This approach is also a requirement of the Charter.

20 We acknowledge that the Member Development Working Group recognises these issues and that the development of innovative and flexible approaches in delivering activities which are timely, current and informative continues to be high on its agenda.

21 It is our view that the most effective way of increasing Member engagement is the designing of learning plans which allow for personalised learning. With this in mind, we consider the role of the

Personal Development Plan (PDP) to be crucial.

22 PDPs are offered to all Members, however, take up currently stands at only 21 out of 99 Members.

23 To improve this figure we recommend that the Member Development Officer works proactively with Group Support Managers in increasing the number of completed PDPs in 2009/2010.

24 We believe senior politicians and group Whips have a crucial role to play in promoting the importance of Member development. We would recommend therefore that all Executive Board Members and group Whips undertake a PDP.

## Recommendation 2

**That the Member Development Officer works with Group Support Managers and Group Whips in a more proactive way to promote the importance of Personal Development Plans and to prepare to increase the number of completed PDPs.**

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## Recommendation 3

**That all Executive Board Members and Group Whips undertake a PDP so as to demonstrate their support for Member Development as an ongoing process.**

25 A major discussion area in this Inquiry has been how we evaluate the effectiveness of the learning and development activities undertaken by Members. We consider it essential that the Council benchmarks the progress of Members, evaluates the success of our processes and ensures that we are getting the most for the money invested in learning programmes.

26 We acknowledge that it is easier in some instances to evaluate the success of learning activities over others, for example the induction training for new Members has clear measurable outcomes. However, we believe there are a number of ways in which the evaluation processes could be improved. These include sharing evaluation data with the event leaders to ensure continuous improvement and also publishing feedback on the events on the Council's Intranet site so that other Members can share learning points and determine whether events/courses would be beneficial to them.

Another general recommendation would be to review the course evaluation form with the aim of capturing more feedback and useful data.

32 To determine whether learning programmes have been of use measurable improvements in performance is key. The difficulty we perceive is who best to make that judgement. Whilst there is clearly a role for group Whips, an element of self evaluation is required. There is currently in

## Recommendation 4

**That the Member Development Officer, as a matter of routine, shares feedback with event presenters and publishes event feedback on the Council's Intranet site.**

**That course evaluation forms be reviewed with the aim of capturing more feedback and more useful data.**

existence a planning officer/member group which assesses the effectiveness of the planning training. We would recommend that this model is replicated to assess all role specific training.



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## Recommendation 5

**That for role specific training, officer/member groups are established to evaluate the effectiveness of such training and to provide feedback to the Member Development Officer.**

### The Council's ability to gain CharterPlus

33 The Member Development Charter will be reassessed in 2010 and Leeds has the option of going for a more stringent award; CharterPlus.

34 The impact of achieving the award is difficult to quantify, but as the aim of CharterPlus is to build elected Member capacity, adhering to the standards will deliver the following benefits:

- Members will become more effective in fundamental skill areas such as dealing with casework, making decisions, communicating with others and working with partners. This will result in reduced support costs, greater efficiency in terms of case resolution/decision-making/scrutinising etc, and thereby more satisfied constituents;
- Linking the development of individual Members to corporate strategic priorities will make it

easier for the authority to achieve its aims and objectives;

- Promoting work-life balance for Councillors will encourage candidates (particularly those with caring responsibilities) to stand for election, and in this way the Council should become more representative of the public it serves;
- A nationally recognised charter-mark will achieve public recognition for real achievements measured against external standards;
- The principles and criteria laid out in CharterPlus provide a structured way to improve the effectiveness of learning and development activities and also provides a focus for the work of the Member Development Working Group;

35 The following areas will be key to the achievement of CharterPlus

- Member Engagement. A majority of Councillors must be shown to have undertaken interviews as part of a formal personal development planning process and must be seen to engage with learning and development activities in some form;
- Members' roles are clearly set out. Role descriptions must be

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in place for each specific 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 (e.g. 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.

36 It is our view that the Council is well placed to meet many of the Charterplus standards but will have to undertake significant work around Member role descriptions and improving Member engagement. We were advised that most councils in our region are aspiring to the new standards but have similar issues to Leeds.

37 Member Management Committee on 4th March 2009 endorsed the commitment to achieve Charterplus in February 2010. We would support this with the caveat that the final decision is made after the external pre-assessment in autumn 2009.

## Recommendation 6

**That the Council commits in principle to achieve CharterPlus in February 2010 and that the final decision is made after the external pre-assessment in autumn 2009.**

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## Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

## Reports and Publications Submitted

- Report of the Member Development Officer – December 2008
- Report of the Member Development Officer – February 2009
- Written Submission – Councillor Graham Latty – Chair – Member Development Working Group
- Written Submission – Councillor Peter Gruen – Chief Whip – Labour Group

## Witnesses Heard

- Kay Sidebottom – Member Development Officer
- Mike Leitch - former Head of Service (Learning & Consultancy) - Local Government Yorkshire and Humber

## Dates of Scrutiny

- 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008 – Scrutiny Board
- 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008 – Scrutiny Board
- 13<sup>th</sup> February 2009 – Working Group