

Providing the Means



A Corporate Scrutiny Committee Working Party Report on Member Development

April 2011

Report, together with written evidence

The Member Development Scrutiny Working Party



Cllr Meller



Cllr N Smith



*Cllr Woodward
Chairman*

The council's scrutiny committees examine, in detail, selected areas of the council's work, responsibilities and policies.

The aim is to find out if there are ways in which the council could be doing things better and to influence national issues.

This report is the result of an examination of a particular subject. It sums up how the scrutiny committee carried out the examination, its findings and considerations, conclusions and recommendations for any improvements.

We published a further document together with this report as a record of all the meetings held in the course of the work to prepare this report.

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Summary, conclusions and recommendations

The Council's Member Development Working Party asked the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to examine Member Development.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee appointed Councillors I Meller, N Smith and R Woodward (Chairman) to the Member Development Scrutiny Working Party.

The working party had benefit of written evidence and oral evidence from Council Members and officers.

The evidence we heard was useful and led to an informative discussion.

We would like to thank all those who have helped us with our work, particularly Councillor Paula Purver, who as Chairman of the Council's Member Development Working Party attended our meetings.

Helped by all the evidence before us, we have been able to consider the Council's Member Development Programme.

It is important that all members attend the induction event being organised after the May 2011 elections. It enables councillors to meet officers and each other!

R1. Notification of induction training is sent to all members at an early stage using appropriate language to stress the expectation and importance of attendance.

'In-house' training can be specifically related to circumstances within the council and will reduce the amount spent on outside specialists when expertise exists within the council.

R2. Specialist training is provided 'in-house' rather than employ outside trainers.

Following training for regulatory committees, members would benefit from attending hearings/meetings as observers after attending training.

R3. To supplement specialist training, members are invited to 'sit-in' during hearings to experience the nature of hearings and meetings.

The requirements of the Member Development Charter would not seem achievable with the council's current approach to member development.

R4. The council no longer seek to achieve the Member Development Charter.

We feel that we have completed the work for which the working party was established and present this report and recommendations.

R5. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee dissolves the Member Development Scrutiny Working Party

Background

1. The Council's Member Development Working Party asked the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to examine the Council's Member Development with particular reference to evaluating the cost and benefits of Councillor learning and development and the impact it has had on the Council's performance.
2. In response to this request, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee appointed Councillors I Meller, N Smith and R Woodward to a Member Development Scrutiny Working Party.
3. Subsequent to the establishment of the working party, two decisions have had a direct impact on member development.
4. Cabinet made a decision to disband the Member Development Working Party with immediate effect.¹
5. The Council in deciding its budget for 2011-12 did not continue to identify a specific budget for member development.²
6. Against this background, we carried out our examination, looking to future provision for members.

Areas of Work

7. We have received evidence from members,³ officers and others

¹ Source: Cabinet Meeting 15 February 2011 Minute 112 The Role of the Backbencher

² Source: Council Meeting 24 February 2011 Minute 76 Budget and Council Tax 2011-12

that have helped us to examine the current process for Member Development and we have taken into account when making recommendations for improvement of the process.

Evidence Gathering

8. At our meetings, the working party received details of the member development budget.⁴
9. David Dalby, Head of Democratic Services Charnwood Borough Council (Charnwood BC) kindly accepted our invitation to attend one of our meetings and told us of member development in Charnwood.
10. All our witnesses were constructive and helpful to our examination.
11. We would like to thank all those who gave us evidence.

Background evidence

12. In addition to our meetings, we were able to read the Member Development Strategy, Charnwood Borough Council.⁵
13. The council has been committed to and working towards achieving the Member Development Charter.

Oral Evidence

14. At our meetings, we received statements from witnesses as well

³ Email received from Councillor Allman Page 11

⁴ Member Development Budget Out-turn Page 10

⁵ Source: Member Development Strategy published by Charnwood Borough Council

- as observations and contributions from others in attendance.
15. These led to a useful and informative discussion on the issues.
 16. Sabrina Newton outlined the progress made towards the achievement of the Member Development Charter and the outstanding requirements.⁶

Issues Considered

Development of the Member Development Programme

17. The training available to members has been to a reasonable standard but has not attracted a good attendance.
18. The year 2011 will be a year of elections for the Council and it is likely that a number of new, inexperienced Councillors will be elected.
19. We feel that a tailored and sustained induction programme would be highly beneficial to these new members.
20. The induction should include a glossary of 'council' terms and introduction to key officers.
21. A 'buddy'/'mentoring' system would enable newer members to benefit from the experience of longer-serving members and officers.
22. At Charnwood Borough Council (Charnwood BC), the profile of member development seems higher than at North West Leicestershire District Council with a strategy approved by Cabinet and Council.
23. The lead Portfolio Holder chairs the Development Working Party. The ethos of the Council includes Member Development as a high priority.⁷

Resources and Value for Money

24. If all members had attended the training sessions arranged there would have been a cost of £16.39 for each session per member.
25. In fact, attendance was such that the actual cost per attendance was £113.05.⁸
26. We find it hard to justify expenditure at this level.
27. Charnwood BC has a budget of £8,500 for 2009/10 increasing to £10,000 for 2010/11 with special allowance made for the induction training needed during the election year.⁹
28. Since 2007, Charnwood BC has arranged 86 development events with an average attendance of 18: over 960 councillor attendances.¹⁰
29. Although precise costs are not available and some sessions were

⁶ Source: Sabrina Newton, NWLDC oral evidence

⁷ Source: evidence David Dalby, Charnwood BC

⁸ Source: Budget out-turn presented by Sabrina Newton, NWLDC Page 10

⁹ Source: evidence David Dalby, Charnwood BC

¹⁰ Source: evidence David Dalby, Charnwood BC

without cost, this indicates that North West Leicestershire priced the sessions arranged at a similar value for money viability.

30. Recent Council decisions have seen the Member Development Working Party disbanded with effect from May 2011 and elimination of the member development budget¹¹.
31. These decisions obviously have a direct impact on the provision of member development.
32. They particularly affect two specific Member Development Charter requirements that the council had previously met; a member led body to oversee development and an identified budget.¹²
33. There would appear to be a dichotomy between the council's continuing commitment and the decisions that needs resolving.

Meeting the needs of Members and the Council

34. We were impressed by the manner in which the definition of Councillor 'roles' enables Charnwood BC Councillors to identify clearly the development of knowledge or skills that they need.¹³

¹¹ Source: Cabinet Meeting 15 February 2011 Minute 112 The Role of the Backbencher and Council Meeting 24 February 2011 Minute 76 Budget and Council Tax 2011-12

¹² Source: Sabrina Newton, NWLDC oral evidence. Details of Councillor Development Charter requirements at Page 12

¹³ Source: evidence David Dalby, Charnwood BC.

35. We feel that a member should be able to express a need for assistance and additional knowledge necessary to fulfil the role of councillor and receive appropriate support.

Conclusions

36. It is important that Members indicate if anything prevents their attendance at training sessions. This would enable cancellation of non-viable sessions.
37. It is important that all members attend the induction event being organised. It enables councillors to meet officers and each other!
38. The event will enable them to complete the formal paperwork required after election as well as provide an initial grounding in the operation of the council.
39. We feel that the notification of the event should stress strongly to members that it is expected that they attend.
40. We feel that member development remains important during the current financially difficult times.
41. We appreciate that expenditure on development is limited and feel that most of the training could be provided 'in-house'. As well as being specifically related to the council this will reduce the amount spent on outside specialists when expertise exists within the council.
42. Training for regulatory committees¹⁴, in particular, would benefit from members attending

¹⁴ Mainly Licensing and Planning Committees

- hearings/meetings as observers after attending training. This would enable them, having received 'theory' training, to experience the process in practice.
43. The requirements of the Member Development Charter would not seem achievable with the council's current approach to member development.
 44. We feel that we have completed the remit given to us and that the working party completes its work in presenting this report containing our recommendations.

Recommendations

45. The Working Party recommends that;
 1. Notification of induction training is sent to all members at an early stage using appropriate language to stress the expectation and importance of attendance.
 2. Specialist training is provided 'in-house' rather than employ outside trainers.
 3. To supplement specialist training, members are invited to 'sit-in' during hearings to experience the nature of hearings and meetings.
 4. The council no longer seek to achieve the Member Development Charter.
 5. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee dissolves the Member Development Scrutiny Working Party.

The Member Development Scrutiny Working Party

April 2011

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Appendices - Evidence

List of Witnesses

Monday 2 August 2010

Sabrina Newton, Legal Practice Manager, North West Leicestershire District Council

Wednesday 15 December 2010

David Dalby, Head of Democratic Services, Charnwood Borough Council

Wednesday 16 March 2011

Sabrina Newton, Legal Practice Manager, North West Leicestershire District Council

Rachel Wallace, Local Member Support Officer, North West Leicestershire District Council

List of Written Evidence

1. Member Development – Budget Out-Turn Sheet
2. Email from Councillor G Allman
3. The East Midlands Regional Councillor Development Charter Standards

Member Development – Budget Out-Turn Sheet

Opening Balance **£11,500.00**

Expenditure

Standards Board conference	£430.00
Solace e-course	£198.00
Civic Heads course	£125.00
Training costs (7 courses) including expenses	£6,939.66
Food costs	£783.75
Claw back to reserves	£1,500.00

Total Exp. **£9,976.41**

Income

Standards Committee Oct 2009	£1,560.00
Modern Member - Feb 2010	£520.00
Juggling Time - Mar 2010	£520.00
Grant for POP process	£1,950.00

Total Income **£4,550.00**

Balance: **£6,073.59**

Total no. of attendees on internal courses = 48

NWL Councillors = 40

Standards Committee members = 8

Cost per attendee after income deducted and inclusive of claw back = £113.05 per person or excl claw back £81.80 per person for the programme (£16.15 including I £11.69 excluding per person per session)

Had all 38 Councillors and 9 Standards Committee members attended all sessions (331 attendances in total) the cost would reduce to £16.39 inc claw back or £11.86 excluding claw back for the programme. (£2.34 including / £1.69 excluding per person per session).

Email from Councillor G Allman

From: GRAHAM ALLMAN

To: SCRUTINY

Subject: RE: Member Development

Date: 07 August 2010 12:07:03

Keith , from my experience it took at least 18 months as a "new boy" to get to grips with what was going on so if there is a "fast track" in any way then it needs to be looked at, possibly a weekend workshop in the 1st month. A lot of knowledge comes from actually doing the job and the training I have received in the whole has been very good. The speed-reading course was excellent and well recommended along the Leadership Course which was exceptional but not for everyone and big "ask" of personal time (4 x 2 day residential). It not only improved my skills within the political and council world but gave me extra confidence and skills within my business environment.

It is difficult to provide training for such a wide base of people from different backgrounds and with different skill-sets especially as none of the elected members are direct employees of the council (so can't insist on attendance to training courses).

I would like to see elected members sharing their own skill sets with their peer group; there is a lot of knowledge amongst the members. There are several good "train the trainer" courses around, I have gained such professional skills myself and do know that other members also have these skills and ability to train others, Matthew Blain comes to mind. However this does mean further commitment for "the few" but some of the retired members may wish to take up this training which of course would be cost effective i.e. "VFM" during these difficult times.

Regards

Graham

The East Midlands Regional Councillor Development Charter Standards

1. Commitment to councillor development

- 1.1. Political and managerial leadership is committed to the development of councillors.
- 1.2. Councillor Learning and Development Policy
- 1.3. Access to learning and development takes into account diversity of needs
- 1.4. Designated budget for councillor development
- 1.5. Officer support for councillors development

2. Strategic approach to councillor development

- 2.1 Councillor led strategy
- 2.2. Councillor roles are clearly defined
- 2.3. Individual Learning and Development Plans
- 2.4. Political Leadership and Executive Team Development
- 2.5. Committee Learning and Development
- 2.6. Development opportunities are promoted and take into account access requirements.
- 2.7. Joint learning activities with officers, partners and the wider community.
- 2.8. Corporate Councillor Learning and Development Plan prioritising activities.
- 2.9. Structured Induction process for all new councillors.
- 2.10. Evaluation mechanisms that inform future plans.
- 2.11. Councillor Learning and Development Reference Group

3. Learning and development is effective in building capacity

- 3.1. Councillors learn and develop effectively.
- 3.2. Learning is shared with other councillors and where appropriate, with officers and stakeholders.
- 3.3. Investment in learning and development is evaluated in terms of benefits and impact.
- 3.4. Improvements to learning and development activities are identified and implemented

4. Councillor development promotes work life balance and citizenship

- 4.1. Council assists those with caring responsibilities.
- 4.2. Council examines how council business is conducted to allow for equality of access to key political decision making processes.
- 4.3. Council holds events for the community to encourage people to become future community leaders.