

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of a Meeting of the Member Development Working Party held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 21 September 2009

Present: Councillors:
Andrew Moulding (Chairman)
Vivienne Ash
Christine Drew
Pat Graham
Ann Liverton

Also present: Hannah Jarvis, Democratic Services Support Officer
Chris Lane, Democratic Services Officer
Diana Vernon Democratic Services Manager

Apologies Councillors
Graham Godbeer

The meeting started at 3.35 pm and ended at 4.25 pm

*1 **Report of meeting**

Members noted the report of the meeting of Working Party held on 1 April 2009.

2 **Proposed role and remit of Member Development Champion**

Councillor Ann Liverton had been appointed Member Development Champion at the Annual Meeting of the Council. The Member Champion, Portfolio Holder – Resources and the Democratic Services Manager then met to discuss the Champion role and remit. The Working Party was now asked to consider the following:

Role and Remit of Member Development Champion:

- To act in a supporting role to encourage all Councillors to take up learning opportunities and promote the value of continual learning.
- To help raise the profile of Member Development within the Council, emphasising the fact that Member Development is for the benefit of the whole Council and district and is non-political.
- To act as a 'critical friend' to help identify possible areas for development through discussion with councillors and general observation at meetings.
- Similarly, to help identify the benefits gained as a result of development opportunities and how these support the Council's corporate strategy/priorities. This evaluation is necessary to ensure that we achieve value for money from the initiative.
- To work with the Portfolio Holder – Resources and Democratic Services to help identify learning opportunities and to allocate these opportunities in a fair and relevant way. This approach will ensure that the budget is used effectively and we achieve value for money.
- To help progress the Council's bid for Member Development Charter Status which will include promoting the initiative, checking the file of evidence and involvement in the interviews with the Charter Assessors
- To encourage effective communication between elected members and local town and parish councils.

The Member Champion to work closely and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder – Resources.

2 **Proposed role and remit of Member Development Champion (cont)..**

The Member Champion had been proactive in progressing a training package for new and experienced Members appointed to the Development Management Committee at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Council. She was supportive of employing a number of development methods including workshops, networking, observation and mentoring/coaching of Members appointed to a new role. She also said that targeted information packs were helpful.

Feedback from conferences attended was now circulated to all Members and relevant Officers. The Member Champion advised that she would try to ensure that Members appointed to Outside Bodies gave feedback to the Council and particularly the relevant Portfolio Holders.

RECOMMENDED that, the role and remit of the Member Development Champion be agreed and supported.

*3 **Evaluation of Member Development and Training**

The Member Development and Training Evaluation Strategy had been considered by the Working Party at its last meeting and been approved by Council in July. The Strategy included three levels of evaluation, namely:

Level 1 evaluation to check that the development and training had achieved its aims and objectives; feedback to be used to influence the way learning opportunities were provided in the future.

Level 2 evaluation to check whether the development and training had achieved changes in attitudes and behaviours.

Level 3 evaluation to monitor the impact of development and learning on helping the Council to achieve its Corporate Priorities/aims.

Information gathered from the evaluation and from feedback from the Working Party would be used in a report to the Strategic Management Team for consideration.

ACTION that the Democratic Service Manager prepare a report in consultation with the Portfolio Holder – Resources and the Member Development Champion for presenting to the Strategic Management Team as a means of evaluating the value and effect of the development and learning opportunities provided to Members.

4 **Member Training and Conference budget**

The Working Party noted how the Member Training and Development and Conference budget had been used and supported a similar budget for 2010/11. The development programme reflected the Corporate Priorities and linked to Councillors' needs identified through their Personal Development Reviews.

RECOMMENDED that the Member Training and Development and Conference budget be retained at the current level in 2010/11.

*5 **Member Development Charter**

Members noted a letter from South West Employers confirming East Devon's self-assessment and action plan which had been submitted following approval by the Working Group at its last meeting. It was formal recognition of this Council's commitment to achieving the South West Charter for Member Development.

The draft file of evidence had now been prepared and had been checked by the Portfolio Holder Resources and the Devon Improvement Programme (DIP) Officer and would now be checked by the Member Development Champion.

It was suggested that Councillor Trevor Cope be asked to proof read the document. He had undertaken a similar task for the Housing Review Board in the past and his comments had been invaluable.

The Working Party gave consideration to the Assessment Guidelines which included details of the assessors' visit and the areas of questioning. It was hoped that the Assessment could be carried out on 30 October 2009 when the Assessment Team would interview key stakeholders, including:

- The Leader
- The Chief Executive
- Leader of an Opposition Group
- Chair or Portfolio Holder
- Chair or Member of Training Group
- A newly Elected Member
- Some randomly picked Elected Members (representing all parties)
- The Officer responsible for Member Training.

The Working Party was confident that the Assessment Team would appreciate that member development at this Council was Member-led and that learning and development was embedded in the culture of the organisation. The initiative recognised that all Councillors had a diverse range of skills and experiences which needed to be used for the benefit of the organisation.

- ACTION**
1. that Councillor Trevor Cope be asked to undertake the final proof reading of the Portfolio of Evidence,
 2. that, 2 copies of the Portfolio of Evidence be submitted to South West Employers for assessment following up-dating and checking,
 3. that preparation be made for visit of the South West Employers' Assessment Team including advising key stakeholders who would be called upon for interview and preparing guidance notes.

*6 **Six monthly reviews**

The purpose of the six monthly reviews was to check that Members' individual needs were being met and if there were any new learning and development requirements. The review would cover the development opportunities that had been taken up and whether these had been of benefit, progress made in achieving personal goals, what further help was needed and whether barriers identified in the original review had been overcome. All Councillors would be sent a review form which they could complete and return. However it was felt that most Councillors would appreciate being given the opportunity to meet Chris Lane or Diana Vernon, Democratic Services, who had carried out the original reviews, to discuss achievements, development needs and other related issues. Alternatively, the review could be carried out over the telephone.

- RESOLVED** that the six monthly reviews be rolled out to all Councillors in October/November.

7 **Additional Issues raised by the Working Party**

Members discussed a number of matters which, they believed, if addressed would benefit all Councillors in carrying out their roles.

It was suggested that the key officer contact list sent out quarterly to all Councillors should be sent out as a paper copy and include room numbers. It was felt that this would help Councillors to locate Officers when calling into the Knowle Offices.

Members recognised the high cost of print and post but felt that the recent reduction in the number of paper copies of agendas was impractical and unwelcome. Paper agendas continued to be issued to those Councillors who were Members of a Committee but the number of spare paper copies had been reduced in a bid to cut back on the cost of print and post. It was suggested that all Councillors be asked, bearing in mind the cost of printed agendas, to advise which agendas they needed to be sent/made available to them.

It was suggested that Councillors with rural wards were disadvantaged due to distances involved; District Councillors are not entitled to claim travelling expenses for attending formal meetings of Parish Councils within their ward.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that future key officer contact lists sent out quarterly to Councillors include Officer room numbers and, unless requested otherwise, sent as paper copies to Councillors;
 2. that a letter be sent to all Councillors asking which Committee agendas they needed to receive as paper copies at the same time as reminding them of the high print cost involved.
 3. that the Independent Remuneration Panel be asked to consider whether the scheme of allowances in respect of travelling should be amended to address the cost of Ward Councillors having to travel significant distances to attend local parish meetings within rural wards.

*8 **Next meeting**

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Working Party be called as required.