

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Report of a Meeting of the Member Development Working Party held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 7 February 2008**

**Present:** Councillors:

A T Moulding (Chairman)

Miss V Ash

Mrs C E Drew

G Godbeer

J Humphreys

**Apology** Mrs P A Graham

**Also present:** Marion Geare, Devon Member Development Officer (part meeting)  
Diana Vernon, Democratic Services Manager

The meeting started at 9.00 am and ended at 11.10 am

#### **\*6 Report of meeting**

Members noted the report of the first meeting of Working Group held on 6 November 2007 and discussed the action taken.

- ACTION**
1. Note that the actions recommended at the last meeting of the Group and approved by the Executive Board have been implemented or are being processed,
  2. The role of Members serving on Outside Bodies to be referred to the Annual Meeting of the Council for clarification. This report to include how information from meetings of Outside Bodies should be shared with the relevant Portfolio Holders and Officers,
  3. A link to 'modern councillor' be put on the Members' page of the web site to help encourage Councillors to use the LIFT SW Partnership e-learning modules,
  4. The work book Learning Resource - Decision Making – Councils with a Cabinet (including the action point information) be issued to all Councillors

#### **\*7 Issues raised by Members**

A number of key issues were raised by one of our May-elected Councillors. The Portfolio Holder – Resources suggested that it was appropriate to raise these issues at this Working Party together with any other concerns from Councillors. As a result of an e mail to all Councillors inviting feedback, a number of issues were raised and were discussed by the Group.

##### **1. Clash of meetings/commitments**

- Councillors can be invited to meetings only to find the time/date clashing with a previous council appointment. (The Committee timetable, included in the year-book and amended as appropriate on the Council's website and in the Knowledge, does not cover all meetings held. Other meetings such as hearings, briefings and delegations fall outside the Committee meetings timetable.) When staff have Outlook instead of Groupwise, Officers will be able to populate Councillor calendars with meetings (or cancel as appropriate) and so on. However this will not overcome the problem entirely. It was suggested that it would be helpful for Councillors to have an up-to-date electronic diary on the Members' Page of the website. The onus would be on the sections within the Council to keep this up to date.

## **Issues raised by Members (cont)..**

### **2. Clash of meetings/commitments (cont)..**

- ❑ Need to be more aware that some of our Councillors work full time and find it difficult to attend day-time meetings/training. All day sessions being particularly difficult.
- ❑ Officers should canvass possible dates of meetings with participants rather than (as often happens) arrange a date and then find Councillors are already engaged elsewhere.

### **3. Amount and timing of paper work**

- ❑ Size of agenda – too big to read and digest before the meeting
- ❑ Reports being tabled – no time to read
- ❑ Committee documents (appendices, supporting paperwork) sent out electronically without page numbers
- ❑ Diarised committee meetings being cancelled and replacements slotted in often at short notice
- ❑ Too much use of coloured paper and colour printing.

### **4. Positive comments and suggestions**

- ❑ Communication is at the heart of keeping up to date and clear about diary commitments – need greater use of e mail and e communication.
- ❑ General satisfaction about day to day operation and management given the complexity and volume of work being covered.
- ❑ Suggest that agendas are sent out earlier than at present
- ❑ Send late reports out electronically if possible rather than table at the meeting
- ❑ Councillors to have their lap tops at meetings to access information to reduce paperwork and print/post costs – or possible use of Blackberries.
- ❑ Portfolio Holders should at all times consult with ward members when they are putting things together in their patch.
- ❑ Welcome return of e mailed 'weekly planning lists'.
- ❑ Concerns re unhelpful use of Voice mail
- ❑ If there is too much business for one meeting, why not schedule more meetings to save having agendas that are far too long?
- ❑ Need better tracking of action agreed at meetings to make sure that recommendations are progressed.

#### **ACTION**

1. ICT be asked to investigate the possibility of setting up an electronic diary on the Members' Page of the web site with all sections being given access rights to add and amend entries,
2. that the suggestion to use laptops and/or blackberries at meetings be not supported at the present time as it was felt that this arrangement would be complicated and could adversely affect debate at meetings,
3. The Deputy Chief Executive be asked to review the use of Voicemail as part of the performance improvement work, currently being carried out, to make sure that this tool is used effectively by all staff,
4. Actions resulting from the recommendations of Task and Finish forums to be reported to Members, possibly through Overview/Scrutiny or through the Knowledge and where appropriate the Taff is reconvened to discuss/track or progress action,

## **Issues raised by Members (cont)..**

5. Speed reading workshops to be included in the Member Development Programme subject to Members feeling that these would be helpful and depending on the cost.
6. Help keep Town and Parish Councils up-to-date by including the News Round up on the Council's web site.

## **\*8 Member Personal Development Reviews**

At the last meeting of the Group, the Portfolio Holder – Resources asked for an item to be included on the next agenda on how to introduce Member Personal Development Reviews.

Marion Geare, Devon Member Development Officer appointed through the Devon Improvement Programme (DIP) was invited to the meeting to discuss this item.

Marion explained that her remit was initially to review the member development work already being carried out by the Devon authorities' and to see how this work could be progressed to help Devon authorities to achieve the standards of the South West Charter for Member Development.

Marion was working with the Devon authorities to devise an action plan to include personal development planning for Councillors, role descriptions and to use the skills framework to help Councils achieve their corporate goals. She was also looking at learning and development opportunities to see what shared learning could be achieved.

The Skills Framework would be used as a starting point to help Councillors identify their strengths, interests and possible areas for development. It will cover all stages in a Councillor's development from being newly elected to an experienced Chairman. It will therefore be a useful tool for achieving succession planning and for the interests and experience of all Councillors to be harnessed for the benefit of the organisation.

Personal Development Portfolios would be used by Councillors to keep a record of achievement and development needs, both personal and corporate. The Portfolio would include a means for measuring achievement, making a clear link between learning and development and the corporate aims. A wide range of learning opportunities would include courses, attending meetings, shadowing, on-line learning and involvement in community activities.

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Work already carried out in Mid Devon and Torbay had been positively received by Councillors. Initially there had been some concerns but Councillors had been reassured about the confidentiality of the process. The success of the introduction was achieved because of the very positive support from key Councillors.

Marion was thanked for her helpful presentation and invited to the next meeting of the Group.

\*8 **Member Personal Development Reviews (cont)..**

- ACTION**
1. that the Devon Member Development Officer be invited to the next meeting of the Group (when the generic Member Development Portfolios would be ready to trial), to discuss how to pilot the scheme.
  2. that the initial roll out of the Member Personal Development Reviews be trialled by the Working Group.

\*9 **Next Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the next meeting of the Working Group be held on Tuesday, 8 April 2008