

Member Development Steering Group

Tuesday, 30th August, 2011

MEETING OF MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

Members present: Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Convery, Hendron, McCabe and
Robinson.

In attendance: Mrs. Jill Minne, Head of Human Resources;
Mr. Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager;
Mrs. Lisa Rogan, Principal Human Resources Advisor;
Mr. Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer;
Mrs. Julie Lilley, Democratic Services Officer.

Election of Chairman

The Members agreed that Councillor Hendron be elected to fill the position of Chairman.

Member Development Update and Future Work Plan

The Steering Group considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 The All-party Member Development Steering Group was constituted in the last Council term to review the Council’s existing Member Development Framework and in particular to develop:-

- **the roles and responsibilities for Elected Members**
- **a revised Induction programme**
- **a revised PDP process**
- **a programme of development activities which would be aligned to the delivery of the priorities in the new Corporate Plan.**

1.2 The Group, supported by officers from the Democratic Services Section and the Human Resources Section, held a number of meetings from November, 2010 to March, 2011. Members agreed a series of actions and initiatives, details of which are set out below, to ensure that a robust and comprehensive Member Development Strategy would be implemented in the new Council term.

1.3 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 3rd June, agreed that the Member Development Steering Group be reconstituted and tasked with taking forward the Member Development Strategy.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Northern Ireland Charter for Elected Member Development

The Member Development Steering Group, at its meeting in January, agreed to adopt the Member Development Charter framework in order to inform the Council's revised Member Development Strategy.

The Council subsequently submitted a bid to NILGA to be considered for participation in the Charter programme and was successful in being chosen as one of four pilot projects which are being rolled out in Northern Ireland.

In March a formal launch of the Charter, hosted by the Lord Mayor, took place in City Hall. Since then, work has continued on a range of issues which were highlighted as requiring further work by the Council if we were to be successful in achieving Charter status.

In order to decide if the Council will be accredited with the Charter, a formal assessment, which will be undertaken by the South East Employers organisation, will take place on 29 November, 2011.

The assessment will involve a series of interviews with members of the Steering Group and Chief Officers as well as a workshop for cross-party Elected Members.

Should we be successful in achieving the charter it is expected that a number of Members and officers will be offered the opportunity of being trained as assessors in respect of other Councils which may decide to seek accreditation through the Charter process.

2.2 Members' Induction Programme

At its meeting in February, the Steering Group agreed to the delivery of a Members' Induction Programme comprising a number of briefing sessions to be delivered between May and October, as well as specialist Committee briefings and site visits. In line with best practice, the Induction Programme has focussed on what information is most useful to Members in the early months of the new Council term, and what will assist them in carrying out their roles and responsibilities.

Evaluation of the induction programme thus far would indicate that Members have found it worthwhile and the content of the briefing sessions to be useful and pitched at the right level.

2.3 Women Leaders Programme

The Steering Group, at its meeting in January, agreed to the delivery of a Women Leaders Programme, a bespoke three day programme which brings together female Elected Members and senior officers from the Council.

The main purpose of the programme is to increase the effectiveness of each participant in her area of influence and to facilitate joint Member-officer development.

During March and April, a Women Leaders Programme was delivered which was attended by three female Members and eight officers.

2.4 Additional Training Modules

The Steering Group oversaw also the delivery of four sessions of training held by Advice NI to raise the awareness of Members on the relevant issues associated with the Welfare Benefits system. Advice NI also produced a comprehensive Benefits Manual designed specifically for Members as a tool to assist them when dealing with their constituents' benefits queries.

Members of the Steering Group also agreed to the delivery of a Suicide Awareness Training Session. The session, which was delivered in April by the Belfast Trust, was well attended and an evaluation of the session rated it as very worthwhile. It is intended that this session will be delivered again over the coming months for the benefit of the newly elected Members and also those Members who were unable to attend the previous session.

2.5 Personal Development Plans for Members

In the previous Council term the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) were commissioned to undertake PDP interviews with Members and produce individual plans which identified the areas of development activity considered to be most beneficial for elected representatives working in a political environment. Members who undertook a PDP were able to access a dedicated individual budget, set at a maximum of £2,000 per annum, which could then be used to undertake a range of development activities designed to further build Members capacity.

One of the roles of the Steering Group is to undertake a review of the current approach to Members' Personal Development Planning (PDP). A separate report will be considered by Members in this regard.

However, it was considered important that while the Steering Group explores possible options for the revised process that Members are still given the opportunity to increase their capacity and access appropriate development activities. With this in mind, a light-touch PDP process has been implemented to identify each individual Member's needs and put in place the necessary training and development activities.

- 2.6 In addition to the light touch process, Members are actively engaging in the Corporate Planning Process which aims to set the priorities for the Council for the current term. Arising out of these discussions, it has become clear that there may be additional development needs identified. The main themes which are emerging through this process are around leadership, the environment, the economy and people and communities.

These development needs can be addressed through a variety of approaches; individually developed workshops, one-to-one training and examining best practice elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. The new approach to the PDP process seeks not to be prescriptive in how Member Development can be achieved. This can be done at an individual, Party or Council level and members can, once a development need is identified, discuss with officers how best this can be met and the approach taken will be flexible to ensure that individual needs are addressed.

2.7 Roles and Responsibilities of Members

As work continues to improve support for Members' development and in keeping with the requirements of the Member Development Charter, it is important that a comprehensive analysis of the roles and responsibilities of Members is undertaken. This will allow for the necessary development opportunities to be put in place in order to ensure that Members have the capacity to deliver effectively in carrying out their roles as a local elected representative.

With this in mind, the Steering Group is asked to agree to the holding of a half-day workshop which will take place in a venue outside the City Hall. It is recommended that the session is facilitated by a suitable Peer Member who will engage Members in identifying the relevant roles and responsibilities so that a robust framework can be put in place to support Members in effectively delivering on these. It is proposed that this session would be held in October.

2.8 Community Leadership Role

A number of Members have recently expressed an interest in undertaking development opportunities which will assist them in effectively delivering their role as a leader within their community.

With this in mind it was felt important to highlight to Members upcoming work which will assist Members in doing this effectively.

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council is the lead partner in the Belfast Community Planning Consortium which was awarded a contract by the BIG Lottery Fund to deliver one of three community planning projects in Northern Ireland. To support the aims of this project, the Consortium have agreed that a formal, accredited, capacity building programme should be developed and run in tandem with the ongoing engagement and participation elements of the project. The programme will be specifically tailored to Belfast but content will also incorporate broader community planning awareness; sessions will include concepts of Community Planning, planning and budgeting processes in community planning, roles and responsibilities, role of data, effective partnerships, best practice in community planning etc. It is envisaged that the programme will comprise a flexible series of sessions, scheduled over the equivalent of a two-day period, for 20 – 25 people including Members and representatives from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

Furthermore, commencing in October 2011 and running through to May 2012, the Good Relations Unit will host a series of lunchtime seminars on the theme of 'engagement'. The series is part of the PEACE III funded 'Growing a Shared City' project and aims to provide attendees with the opportunity to hear current thinking on various issues which impact on socio-economic growth of the city and region. Members will be issued with a personal invitation to each seminar and the anticipated audience is Council staff, representatives from other local councils, central government and the voluntary and community sector.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 The Roles and Responsibilities Workshop is estimated to cost £1,500 and can be met from the Members' Development Budget

4 Equality Implications

- 4.1 N/A

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 The Steering Group is requested to agree to the contents of this report and to the holding of a half-day workshop which seeks to identify the roles and responsibilities of Members. The session, which will be facilitated by a Peer Member, will be held in October in an external venue.

After discussion, the Steering Group noted the contents of the report and agreed to the holding of a half-day workshop to help assist in identifying the roles and responsibilities of Members.

Personal Development Planning

The Principal HR Advisor reminded the Steering Group that an Elected Member personal development planning process had been in place since 2007. She advised Members that the process, which had been voluntary in nature, had been facilitated by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

The Group was informed that the PDP process was being reviewed in line with the overall Council approach in order to gain Member Development Charter status and also to take account of best practice approaches to personal development planning for Members.

The Steering Group was advised that an interim PDP process had been in place from July involving a self-assessment exercise and that to date twenty members have a PDP.

The Principal HR Advisor outlined the following three options for undertaking Members' PDPs in future:

Option 1:

PDP meetings to be facilitated by an external provider. Based on maximum daily costs of approximately £1,000 and a maximum of 51 members partaking in the PDP process the maximum costs of externally facilitated PDPs would be in the region of £17,000 annually (based on three PDP meetings conducted per day).

Option 2:

PDP meetings to be facilitated internally by senior Democratic Services and/or senior HR staff. There would be no direct costs with this option.

Option 3:

PDP meetings facilitated internally by senior Democratic Services and/or senior HR staff but with an option of facilitation by an external provider for those members who would prefer this method. The costs involved with this option will depend on the number of members who would wish to avail of external facilitation. However based on an estimate of 10% of members wishing to have an externally facilitated PDP meeting the maximum costs would be in the region of £2,000 per annum (based on a maximum of £1,000 daily costs).

Following consideration of the options, the Steering Group agreed to implement option 3.