



Democratic Renewal Panel

12 February 2008

Member Development: Update

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Member Development activity which has taken place during 2007/2008, and some preliminary indications of the areas in which development activity might be considered in the 2008/2009 municipal year.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the development activity in the current year and the pattern of attendance.
- 2.2 To ask officers to develop a draft programme for 2008/2009 based on the topics identified in Section 5 below (or as amended by discussion at the meeting).

3. Member Development Activity in 2007/2008

- 3.1 Each year the Panel receives a report on the Member Development activity which has taken place. If the Panel meets in March a final update will be given but the current figures are given below.
- 3.2 To date there have been 45 sessions in total, of which 33 have been internal sessions and 9 external. Thirty of the events have been open to all Members to attend, the remainder have been specific to specialist Committees or individual Councillors holding particular responsibilities. There have been 297 individual attendances in total. This compares to 30 events in the previous year, of which 14 were in-house and there were a total of 123 attendances. The increase is accounted for by this being an induction year for new Councillors elected in May 2007.
- 3.3 The pattern of attendance at development events is given below along with comparative information from the previous two years.

2007/2008

No of events attended	0	1	2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16+
No of Cllrs in the band	4	4	5	10	13	6	3

2006/2007

No of events attended	0	1	2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16+
No of Cllrs in the band	11	6	9	8	10	1	0

2005/2006

No of events attended	0	1	2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16+
No of Cllrs in the band	5	12	5	12	7	2	0

- 3.4 The Panel may wish to consider ways in which to promote attendance at development events in line with the key tasks listed at 2.9 and 2.10 of the Frontline Councillor job description in the Constitution. These tasks are:-

Paragraph 2.9: To develop and maintain a working knowledge of the authority's services, management arrangements, powers/duties and constraints and to develop good working relationships with relevant officers of the authority.

Paragraph 2.10: To participate fully in Councillor training and development programmes, especially those relating to statutory requirements.

4. Circulation of Member Development Plans and Survey Forms

- 4.1 In January 2008, each Councillor was sent a copy of the Member Development Plan, accompanying core skills guidance, and the job descriptions relating to the roles they hold. The paperwork was accompanied by an offer that a Member could have a meeting with either an experienced Councillor or senior officer to work through their development plan. To date four Councillors have requested a meeting.
- 4.2 At the time of writing this report the response rate is low. As a result it is too early to draw any strong conclusions, although initial indications are included at 5.1 below. Officers will give an update if further returns have been made before the Panel meets.
- 4.3 Alongside the Member Development Plans a survey was circulated to establish whether the current default time for training sessions, 5pm on a weekday, and the length of session, between 2 and 2½ hours, were still appropriate. The timing and length had been established following a survey in January 2004. Again the response rate has been low, and no consistent picture has emerged. An update will be provided at the meeting if further information is available and this topic will be considered in more detail at the March 2008 meeting of the Panel.

4.4 For those councillors newly elected in May 2007 there was a second survey form on the "Officer Contact" scheme which was introduced for the first time after the May elections. In summary each new Councillor was allocated a senior officer to act as a liaison point helping them to navigate their way through the organisation in the first few months of their new role. The officer contact would not take on any of their case work but would help put them in contact with the right people to answer the queries they or their local residents had. As it was a new scheme it was felt important to survey recipients of it to see if it was of value. Again the limited number of returns to date means that no conclusions can yet be drawn and a fuller update will be brought to the March meeting.

5. Draft Member Development Programme for 2008/2009

5.1 In November 2005 the Panel brought together the Council's policy on Member Development (copy attached as Appendix 1). That policy recognises that in any year the programme will be a mix of the recurring development needs of particular committees, national and local priorities and the top collective development needs identified by Councillors.

5.2 The Scrutiny Manager will be looking at development needs of the members of those committees as part of her annual preparations for the next year of scrutiny activity, and Cabinet development sessions are being brought forward as necessary with the Cabinet. In addition those officers who work in other specialist areas will bring forward their suggestions for development sessions in conjunction with the Chairmen of those committees as the need arises. Although, as noted, there are not enough Member Development plans returned yet to reveal the top collective development needs of Councillors two items which have a broader relevance have been identified from the returns.

5.3 The first is community leadership. This could be linked to work on engagement with local residents, particularly those in hard to reach groups. The need for these skills has been highlighted by the focus on community leadership in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

5.4 The second is listening, questioning and probing skills which are relevant to all Members of Committees but which can be of particular relevance for scrutiny committee members.

5.5 Other local and national priorities identified by officers for potential inclusion in the next programme include:-

- (a) updates on the Local Government Review process;
- (b) chairing meetings (this is a core workshop repeated every 2 years to provide training as the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees change);
- (c) media training, sessions for Portfolio Holders and the Chairmen of key Committees;
- (d) planning training on a six monthly basis for Members of the Development Control Committee;
- (e) briefings on developments in Waste and on the Local Development Framework;
- (f) further directorate familiarisation sessions; and

(g) briefings on the new working methods and operation of West Suffolk House prior to the move into the new building.

5.6 The Panel is asked to indicate whether it wishes officers to start work on a draft programme based on the areas outlined above and to which the top collective needs of Councillors to be identified through the Member Development Plan process can be added. The draft plan would be brought to the March 2008 meeting of the Panel for consideration.

For further information, please contact:-

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St Edmundsbury Borough Council Member Development Policy

St Edmundsbury Borough Council is committed to the development of its elected Members. The Democratic Renewal Panel has overseen this work. The attached document draws together in one place the elements of the policy that have already been put in place and reported to full Council in the minutes of Panel meetings.

Individual commitment to Member Development

The frontline councillor job description developed by the Panel and incorporated into the Council's constitution makes explicit the expectation that all elected Members will "Participate fully in Councillor training and development programmes, especially those relating to statutory requirements."

Council commitment to Member Development

At full Council in February 2005 the decision was taken to commit St Edmundsbury Borough Council to work to achieve the East of England Regional Assembly Charter for Elected Member Development. This commits the Council to working to meet five criteria:

- Commitment to Member Development
- Strategic Approach to Member Development
- Member learning and development plan in place
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity
- Elected Member development promotes work life balance and citizenship.

The Member Development Framework

The Panel have put the following procedures and reporting structures in place to evaluate and monitor Member Development activity.

The elements of the internal Member Development programme

The Panel recognised that in any one year the programme provided in-house would consist of a number of elements:

1. The recurring development needs of particular committees or groups of councillors such as Cabinet, the Overview and Scrutiny committees or Development Control and Licensing and Regulatory committees.
2. Providing development opportunities/briefings to reflect national priorities.
3. Providing development opportunities/briefings on local priorities and initiatives.
4. Meeting the top collective development needs identified by Members.

In addition in-house events would be supplemented, where appropriate and budget is available, by attendance at specialist external events where necessary.

The development plan process and establishing collective priorities

In January each year every Member is sent a personal development plan to complete to log those areas in which they want to develop further skills and knowledge. The development plan is accompanied by a core skills matrix to prompt Members to think whether they want to develop a range of skills which for convenience have been grouped under twelve thematic headings. The matrix is linked to the job descriptions for different councillor roles by highlighting which skills are called for in particular roles. When returned these development plans are analysed to establish which are the top collective needs.

The top needs can then be addressed cost-effectively through in-house courses. Where the budget allows some individual development needs can also be met through external courses. Through consultation with senior managers development activities to meet national and local priorities are also be provided in-house, either by officers or by bringing in external facilitators.

Evaluation and Monitoring

To ensure that the development opportunities being provided are appropriate and focus on corporate priorities a pro-forma has been developed to capture the aims and objectives of all in-house events. Members attending in-house events are then asked to evaluate the course to establish

- whether it meet the aims and objectives;
- if the development need has been fully met and/or if a further development need has been identified as a result of attending.

Similar evaluation takes place with external events with the additional query of whether the person attending has gained learning which they think should be shared within the Council.

The results of the evaluation of the individual courses will be reported back to the Democratic Renewal Panel in February/March each year so that an assessment can be made of the usefulness of the opportunities provided. Feedback on good and bad experiences can be learnt from in the planning for the next year's programme, the outline of which the Panel will also be considering at that time.

Development opportunities outside formal events

At least as important as formal events are the many development opportunities offered by the way the Council chooses to work. Through becoming a member of a panel or review group set up by one of the Scrutiny Committees to take forward a particular piece of work, many Councillors are developing their knowledge in specialist areas. Examples are panels on skate-boarding and broadband, and review groups on rural services, the evening economy, and service delivery. Similar opportunities are available through membership of working parties on major projects, such as the Cattle Market or public service village.

Opportunities to contribute to the debate on Member Development

The Democratic Renewal Panel extends an open invitation to any Member to attend and contribute to Panel discussions on Member Development. The minutes of all Panel meetings are reported to full Council providing a further opportunity if required for Members to discuss the work of the Panel on Member Development.

November 2005
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