



SCRUTINY TRAINING ASSESSMENT GROUP



MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT

March 2003

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INTRODUCTION

1. Local Government is changing rapidly. This Working Group was set up at the request of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Corporate Management issues to consider whether the current training and development for County Council Members required revision.
2. A Working Group was formed which considered evidence about this issue. Because this is an area which is uniquely relevant to County Council Members it was not considered necessary to include a stakeholder in the composition of the Working Group. However to introduce a challenge Northumbria University provided comparative information about practice in other authorities.

Terms of Reference

3. The Terms of Reference adopted by the Group were as follows:

To review the current training and development available to County Council Members with a view to considering whether this:-

- (a) **reflects the changes brought about by the modernisation of Local Government, including the establishment of the Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny and the Community and Leadership Role of Members;**
- (b) **delivers the personal training and development needs of Members in connection with their roles as Councillors;**
- (c) **keeps Council Members up to date with legislation, Government initiatives and relevant changes in services provided by the Council;**
- (d) **provides value for money;**
- (e) **is correctly targeted**

and if necessary to make recommendations for improvement.

Assessment of Current Provision

4. An explanation was given about the current training and development arrangements for Council Members. It was helpful that this issue had been considered by the recent Best Value Review of Democratic Services and Participation. This Review had identified the need to pursue a more structured approach to Members' training and development.
5. This Working Group was able to take into account practical experience of the Council's New Constitution since its introduction on 1st January 2002. An induction process assists new Members after an Election and a wide

variety of training is provided on a ongoing basis to seek to cover the complex role of a County Council Member. This includes technical issues such as IT training, personal development and also the provision of information about changes in legislation and Council services.

6. The importance of continued support to Members in developing all of their new roles was highlighted in the Council's self-assessment for the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
7. Whilst it was clear that training and development was considered to be an important issue by the Council it became clear that if the Authority is to achieve its ambition of becoming an "excellent Council" a more structured approach to training and development needs to be considered.

Consideration of Good Practice in other Authorities

8. Craig Moore from Northumbria University was commissioned to survey other Local Authorities to assess their approach to training and development of Members. His brief was particularly to look for good practice which might be of interest and assistance to this Authority.
9. His research made it clear that many Authorities, particularly "beacon" authorities in relation to democratic issues, had introduced a Personal Development Plan for Council Members to seek to assess the training needs of Members in a more structured and targeted format. The general view was that this had provided considerable benefits to those Authorities. The added value provided by a more focused approach to training and development was seen to be a significant issue in terms of the overall performance of a Council.
10. The Working Group had in mind the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council which concentrated particularly on corporate governance. The varied and complex role of Councillors was a key to ensuring that the Council performed successfully in this area. It was essential therefore that Members were equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge to oversee the corporate governance of the Authority and to pursue their crucial community and leadership role.
11. An explanation was also given about a number of initiatives introduced in respect of training and development for Members relating to the Durham Police Authority.

Consideration of an Elected Member Learning and Development Programme

12. The Personnel Division of the Corporate and Legal Services Department explained the arrangements which could be introduced to provide a more structured and focused service for Members in this area.
13. The key to this approach would be to develop a Personal Development Plan which would be available to all Council Members. This required a "one to one" interview with a senior personnel officer on an annual basis. Proposed documentation was considered by the Working Group. A large number of Members of the Working Group (9) were interviewed by staff from the Personnel Division to assess in practice how a Personal Development Plan could be introduced. This exercise provided valuable feedback to ensure that the documentation was user friendly and delivered the appropriate assessment of needs. A copy of the Personal Development Plan revised following this exercise is attached to this report.
14. Once training needs had been assessed the Personal Development Plan would then inform decisions about training and development for Members on an annual basis. By assessing needs in this way it was possible to identify in advance common themes in training which could then be delivered more cost effectively by bringing training to Members rather than the current arrangements which are largely based on small numbers of Members attending external courses and conferences. External courses would still be an element of training and development. The opportunity to network with colleagues from other Authorities was a key element in continuous improvement.

Main Issues

15. The main issues which arose from this investigation were that the Working Group considered:
 - that the current arrangements did require revision;
 - that there was a need to ensure that training and development keeps pace with the modernisation agenda;
 - the more structured approach to training and development via a Personal Development Plan should be recommended to Cabinet and introduced for a period of a year and then reviewed;
 - if the Council is to achieve its ambitious target to improve services to the public and be assessed as 'excellent', the role of Council Members will be crucial. Accordingly, all Members should be encouraged to participate in this more structured approach to training and development. Cabinet should be asked to endorse this approach;

- the system should be flexible so that it caters for all 61 Members of the Council and provides a transparent and justified process;
- the general approach should be to seek the most cost effective training and development opportunities which may involve more locally based focused training;
- where appropriate, combined Officer and Member training should be considered and feedback from courses and conferences to the benefit of all Members should be considered, including a 'data base' of courses attended and supporting information;
- some areas of training should be essential where protection of the authority's interests is required. The essential areas of training should be identified at an early stage of the process (such as planning, Senior Officer appointments etc.);
- decisions about attendance at courses and conferences should be informed by the Personal Development Plan. This will require some refinement in due course about the arrangements for authorising attendance which can be informed in the light of experience of the new approach. The principle for authorisation should be consultation with a Member with responsibility for the relevant area of the Council's business and should include checks and balances;
- the co-ordination role for all Member training and development should be revised in line with these recommendations. Responsibility for this function should be allocated to the Personnel Division, under the general delegated power of the Director of Corporate and Legal Services including management of the current training and development budget for Members (this revision should not require any additional staffing provision). This will also require the establishment of an appropriate officer network with Service Departments to assist in this co-ordination role;
- A Member Officer Working Group should be established including Executive and Non-Executive Members to oversee and review Member training and development.

Recommendations

1. That an elected Member Learning and Development Programme be introduced as soon as practicably possible based on the individual Personal Development Plan considered by the working group.
2. The Programme should be reviewed after one year's operation to assess whether the improvements sought are being achieved.

3. The co-ordination role for all Member training and development should be allocated to the Personnel Division, under the general delegated power of the Director of Corporate and Legal Services including management of the current training and development budget for Members.
4. The following principles should guide this Programme:-
 - If the Council is to achieve its ambitious target to improve services to the public and be assessed as 'excellent', the role of Council Members will be crucial. Accordingly, all Members should be encouraged to participate in this more structured approach to training and development. Cabinet should be asked to endorse this approach;
 - the system should be flexible so that it caters for all 61 Members of the Council and provides a transparent and justified process;
 - the general approach should be to seek the most cost effective training and development opportunities which may involve more locally based focused training;
 - where appropriate combined Officer and Member training should be considered and feedback from courses and conferences for the benefit of all Members should be considered, including a 'data base' of courses attended and supporting information;
 - some areas of training should be essential where protection of the authority's interests is required. The essential areas of training should be identified at an early stage of the process;
 - a Member Officer Working Group should be established including Executive and Non-Executive Members to monitor and review Member training and development.

Members of the Working Group:-

Councillor D. Marshall (in the Chair)

Councillors: Armstrong, Ebbatson, Firby, E. Foster, Mrs. Hodgson, Hogan, Mrs. Hunter, Martin, Myers, Porter, Pye, Robson and Tennant.

The Working Group would like to thank the Members and Officers who submitted evidence to assist the Working Group in this project. Special thanks go to:-

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