

Report of the Assistant Director Governance & ICT

Outcomes from the Member Training & Development Focus Groups

Summary

1. This report sets out the outcomes from the recently undertaken Member Training & Development focus groups. Members are asked to comment on the outcomes, which are summarised in **Annex A** to this report.

Background

2. At a meeting of the Member Development Steering Group held on 12th October 2011 the Steering Group agreed that a survey of Members' training and development needs should take place biannually. This happened for the first time in January 2012 as a paper exercise. The survey was carried out again in September 2012 but was done verbally in the form of Focus Groups. All Members of the Council were invited to attend these focus groups to comment on Training and Development sessions they had personally attended between 1st February 2012 and 31st August 2012. Members were also asked about what training and development sessions they might like to see offered in the future.

Consultation

3. All Members of the Council were asked for their views on the training provided to date and what they might like to see in the future.

Options

4. Members are asked to comment on the information within this report and its associated annex.
5. 10 Members attended the focus groups or submitted feedback via email and a summary of their responses is at **Annex A** to this report.

6. Some of the key themes emerging from the comments received were as follows:
7. Timing – A number of Members expressed concern at the level of commitments they already had and the difficulties they faced in finding time to attend training sessions. Some Members said that it was difficult for them to leave work early to get to the Guildhall for afternoon/early evening training sessions. In response to this Democratic Services are very aware of Members other commitments (personal, work and Council) and try very hard to put on sessions when the most Members are likely to be available (usually starting late afternoon/evening) – however there is, unfortunately, no ‘one size’ fits all solution to this.
 - E-learning – following the previous survey there had been a couple of comments around increasing the amount of e-learning available to Members. E-learning opportunities are advertised in the core programme booklet, however there has been very little take up of what is already offered. Some Members were interested in using e-learning and agreed to email Democratic Services with suggestions for topics. Other Members felt that sitting at a computer was not a training method that would work for them. Other Members did not realise it was available to them and asked that reminders be included in the Members’ e-bulletins.
 - Providing different levels of training (i.e. beginner, intermediate, experienced) and acknowledging that more longstanding Members will, in some cases, have different training needs to newly elected Members. Newly elected Members also had a wish for some of the subjects covered this municipal year to be covered in more depth next year but at the same time avoiding repetition.
 - Training targets and the core programme – comments were also made around rationalising future core programmes both to save money and to be less onerous on Members’ time. Several Members felt that a review of the training targets set (12 sessions for Cabinet Members and 8 for non-Cabinet Members annually) needed to take place alongside rationalising the programme.
8. The following were identified by Members as possible subjects for future training sessions or as being sessions that should continue in future:
 - Training on how to attract funding
 - Ward work and how to help your residents

- Continuation of IT courses and training sessions.
 - Planning training is useful but some members questioned if all of the updates were necessary.
 - Policy training/cafes are a good idea
 - Departmental overviews once a year would be useful.
 - Training on Community Right to Challenge/Buy policy.
9. All the suggestions above will be addressed or considered for inclusion within the core programme for 2013/14. However, it cannot be guaranteed that sessions on all of these will be offered, especially for those where there maybe a significant cost involved.
10. Where issues raised affect only one individual, or we know we cannot provide what they are asking for, the Members in question will be contacted directly.

Analysis

11. As can be seen from above and the information in **Annex A** several issues have been raised around training provision, these are analysed in the paragraphs below.
12. Timings of Sessions - A commonly recurring theme of 'timings of sessions' was raised and as already stated in **paragraph 7** there is unfortunately, no perfect solution. Training sessions are usually held with a 5pm or 5.30pm start as this seems to be the majority's preference. However, where possible training sessions are scheduled for when it is known that Members will already be in the Guildhall (such as before Planning Meetings or Full Council) and on the whole, these are well attended.
13. E-Learning - A comprehensive E-Learning package was advertised in the core training programme for this municipal year (as it had been in previous years) and has, to officer's knowledge, had very little take up. However, a number of Councillors have expressed an interest in E-Learning, some of whom seemed unaware of what was on offer. This could indicate that there is a piece of work for Democratic Services to do around advertising and promoting what is already on offer. A report on the provision of E-Learning is already scheduled into the workplan for the January meeting of this Steering Group.
14. Different Levels of Training – This is something that has been raised on several occasions and is relatively difficult to address. Democratic Services would need Members who wanted more advanced training to

identify their specific needs so that suitable training could be sourced; this may need to be external training and unless offered as part of the core programme would need to be paid for from the Group Pots for external training. However, officers could explore the possibility of some more advanced training provision being provided internally but specific themes/areas for any training would need to be identified before this could happen. We would also need to ensure a good turn out for any session delivered.

15. Training targets and the core programme – Currently Democratic Services are liaising with the University of York on the possibility of creating an accredited programme for Members, with an option for an unaccredited version. This is beginning to take shape and the Director of Community Relations and Lifelong Learning is scheduled to attend the January meeting of the Steering Group to discuss this.
16. Democratic Services acknowledge that there are still discussions to be had around the most appropriate way forward for the next municipal year; especially in light of ongoing discussions with the University and the need to manage resources more effectively.
17. In addition to what has been offered in this year's core training and development programme officers within the Council have frequently requested an opportunity to brief Councillors on various subjects. These have usually been accepted and a training/development session arranged. However, this municipal year has not seen a great turn out for many sessions, maybe due to the sheer volume of what has been offered. In light of this, and to stop the training and development provision being so intense and haphazard, it may now be the right time to consider how this Steering Group could become involved in managing requests from officers (outside of the core programme) to brief Councillors.
18. If the collaboration with the University becomes the way forward for next year then there will probably be a need to review the training targets set alongside how the core programme is produced. This could be done as part of the Annual Review of Policy which is due to be presented to this Committee soon.
19. Possible training sessions for the future – At the focus groups Members identified several sessions they would like to see in the future, these are set out in **Paragraph 8** above. Depending on the format of the next core training and development programme these could be included. The Steering Group should note that both the IT drop-in sessions and the

social media drop-in sessions (both offered over 6 sessions) mentioned above saw a relatively low turn-out (under 5 Councillors in total attended) yet there were several requests for these to be repeated. There have, however, been several requests recently for help with setting up I-Pads and other tablet devices so that Councillors can access their Council e-mail; there may be merit therefore, in arranging some drop-in sessions with the IT department as this isn't something Democratic Services can cover in the drop-in sessions they currently offer.

20. The request for training on the Community Right to Challenge/Buy policy is currently being arranged and it is hoped that this will happen sometime early in the new Year. The request for training on interests and pecuniary interests will be covered by the training sessions on the New Code of Conduct scheduled for January 2013, to which many Members have already signed up.

Council Plan

21. Providing training and development to its Members demonstrates the Council's commitment to well trained and knowledgeable Members, in turn, making informed decisions relating to the new key priorities set out in the Council Plan.

Implications

22. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, other than the fact that the annual training programme for Members is supported by the Member Development Budget.
23. **Human Resources** – supporting the core training and development programme in its current guise is resource intensive for Democratic Services. This will be addressed in a future report around what sort of training and development programme we offer for 2013/14 There are no known legal or other implications associated with the contents of this report.

Risk Management

24. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy there are no risks associated with the recommendations in this report. However there will be risks that the decision making process could be undermined if Members are not provided with enough relevant

training/information to allow them to be fully informed prior to making decisions.

Recommendations

25. Members are asked to

- Note and comment upon the focus groups findings and the responses (Annex A refers)

Reason: In order to ensure that Members views are considered when developing new training and development programmes.

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**Report
Approved**



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Specialist Implications Officer(s) None

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A Summary of responses received