

## Member Development Programme

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### Purpose of this report

1. This report gives a summary of learning and development events delivered as part of the Member Development Programme and an overview of events planned for the remainder of the Programme.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the events and participation in the Member Development Programme from May 2015 to April 2016.
2. Comment on the proposals and suggestions for forthcoming events in the Member Development Programme and the preferred way of taking the Programme forward (Para.14)
3. Comment on the proposals for monitoring the learning objectives of the Programme. (Paras. 12-13)
4. Consider the role of Members in promoting the Member Development Programme to colleagues.

### Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The Member Development Programme falls within the remit of the General Purposes Committee rather than Overview and Scrutiny.

## Introduction

1. The Member Development Programme was launched in May 2015 after the local elections of Ward Members. The Programme has been developed around the main themes of:-
  - Community leadership
  - Scrutiny and challenge
  - Communication skills
  - Partnership working

## Phase 1 – Induction Programme

1. An Induction Day was held on 14 May 2015 to welcome the new Council, followed by an Induction Programme, which included a number of sessions held during May and June 2015, to introduce Members to the Council's services and key responsibilities (Appendix A). The feedback from the sessions was positive, with Members requesting further information and further development sessions on topics of interest.

Feedback included:-

*'A very interesting and comprehensive presentation. However, it was an awful lot for a new boy to take in.'* This comment was a response to the Introduction to Local Government Finance session. A further Briefing has been planned for July on the budget, taking account of this and other similar feedback received.

*'I learnt a considerable amount about a new area of work. Thanks to all.'* (Introduction to Housing – 11.6.15).

*'Very informative and thought provoking. Has prompted me to thoroughly read and digest the Constitution and Code of Conduct.'* (Being a Councillor – 12.6.15)

2. As part of the Programme, a Member/Officer 'Buddy Scheme' was arranged, where newly elected Members were introduced to an 'Officer Buddy' as a point of contact for help and advice during the initial months of their appointment. The Scheme was offered to 17 newly elected Members.
3. The Officer Buddy scheme was successful in single-Member wards, and for those Members not in the majority Group, where there was not the support of a Member buddy. Where new Members had the support of a more experienced Member, the Officer Buddy scheme was less successful.

## Member Survey

4. In order to inform the Programme, Members were asked to take part in a Survey during September 2015. A total of 23 Members responded and themes of interest have been noted to develop future learning sessions.

## Phase 2 – events held

5. Phase 2 of the Programme has been designed to inform Members about key themes, identified and agreed with the Leader and Lead Member for Learning and Development, over the course of the four years of the current Council.
6. The following events were held between November 2015 and January 2016:-
  - **Effective Scrutiny and Challenge** – December 2015  
The session was led by the LGA and a Member peer and was offered to all Members, being of particular interest to those who are currently on Overview and Scrutiny Committees and to those Ward Members who were interested in finding out more about the Scrutiny process.
  - **Community Leadership** – January 2016  
Two sessions were held with one aimed at Executive Members and Chairs and the other for all Members. Both were led by the LGA and a member peer.
7. In addition, other learning opportunities are regularly offered to Members including workshops and briefings, delivered by officers. Recent briefings have taken place on a diverse range of subjects on issues such as; domestic abuse, welfare reform and the Local Plan. The average attendance at the briefing sessions is 19, with some events attracting between 25 and 30 Members. This programme is ongoing with briefings scheduled to take place during the remainder of the term of the Council. Many of the briefings are as a result of a request from Members to find out more about a subject which affects their constituency and the wider area of Central Bedfordshire.

## Overview/Lessons Learned

8. The feedback received from Members about the learning sessions is generally very positive and informs what can be done differently at future sessions as part of continuous improvement.
  - a) The events are well publicised in the Members Information Bulletin, by email invitations and with posters displayed in Priory House, but the attendance rate is generally low. On occasions when officers from the LGA and Member peers from other Authorities have attended to deliver a session, attendance has been relatively low ranging from 22%-35% of the total number of elected Members. The average number attending a learning session is 20.
  - b) In order to increase the numbers, officers need to better understand what prevents Members attending – is it the content or timing of the sessions or that the learning offered is of limited interest, or that

Members' schedules make it difficult for them to attend? Officers organise and promote the events in the Member Development Programme, but there may be a role for Members, particularly senior Members, to encourage their colleagues to attend events.

9. Feedback received from the informal Briefing sessions indicates Members are very interested in hearing case studies about how the Council's services have had a positive impact on individual lives, especially when the individuals concerned attend to talk about their experiences, such as in two recent Briefings on Domestic Abuse and Looked After Children.
10. A key theme emerging from the feedback is that Members want to be kept informed on developments around the issues raised at the Briefings, either through half year/annual updates or being sent further information.
11. Following attendance at a learning session, Members have asked for further training on that subject, to gain a better understanding of their role and responsibilities on Committees.

### **Monitoring Outcomes**

12. Learning objectives were defined when the Programme was developed. Mechanisms to monitor the objectives should ensure they are reviewed, in practice, and action taken, if required.
13. To monitor whether the sessions have delivered the intended outcomes, the following actions are proposed:-
  - a) Survey the Chairs of Committees to identify whether they feel the Committee is operating effectively and whether the learning and development sessions have contributed to this.
  - b) Monitor the feedback received after the sessions and subsequent engagement from Members requesting further learning/information.
  - c) Send a follow-up survey, between 4-6 month after the session, asking for Members views on whether the learning has been put into practice and the impact it has had on their work.
  - d) Continue with the annual survey (initially sent in September 2015) asking Members for their views and suggestions about future learning sessions as part of a continuous improvement policy to ensure the Programme of events is relevant.

### **Phase 2 – Planned Events**

14. During the next four months to the end of September 2016, the following events are proposed:-
  - Media Training (for Executive Members)
  - Social Media Training (for all Members and Town & Parish Councillors)

A session on Partnership Working is also planned for later in the year.

There are also a number of further briefings planned from the Council's officers on their services and topics of interest.

### **Council Priorities**

15. An effective and comprehensive Member Development Programme, which enhances Members' knowledge and skills on a wide range of topics and supports all of the Council's priorities.

### **Corporate Implications**

#### **Legal Implications**

16. It is essential that members are aware of and act within their scope and remit to lessen the potential for successful challenge or complaints about member decisions or conduct. Such challenges and complaints use up resources as well as affected the reputation of the Council. An effective and ongoing programme of briefings and training in identified areas assists with this as will the support of more experienced members.

#### **Equalities Implications**

17. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Council's code of conduct for members highlights the need to be mindful of the requirements of equality legislation. Two interactive sessions, outlining the requirements of equality legislation, were held with members as part of the induction process.

#### **Conclusion and next Steps**

18. The Member Development Programme has been designed to offer opportunities for Members to enhance their skills and knowledge at the best value to the Council. The events delivered by the LGA did not incur any costs.
19. The appointment of consultants to deliver future events will be made following a rigorous procurement process.
20. The Member Development Programme will continue to offer a range of learning opportunities to Members throughout the term of the Council, in consultation with the Leader and the Lead Member for Learning and Development.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A – Induction Programme – May-June 2015

**Background Papers:**

None