North West Employers'

Feedback from the

Personal Development Plan Interviews

with the Elected Members

at Copeland Borough Council

December 2005

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Introduction

As part of the overall strategy for elected member development, one to one Personal Development Plan interviews were arranged for Copeland Borough Council elected members during November and December 2005. The primary aim of the interviews was to identify the development needs of members through the completion of a Personal Development Plan (PDP). As part of the one to one interviews, members were also offered the opportunity to feedback information to the Council covering the following:

a) Areas for development
b) Preferred learning style
c) Review of the Personal Development Plans

Approach

In total, 33 elected members took part in the scheduled Personal Development Plan interviews during November and December 2005. Feedback sheets were completed for most of the interviews. 30 interviews were conducted by NW Employers and 3 of the interviews were conducted internally by Members of the training panel.

As agreed individually, with the members involved in the PDP interviews, the information recorded on the feedback sheets would be used to devise a programme of development and support to meet the needs of all members. In addition, some of the feedback information can also be used to address specific individual development needs, as appropriate. Data from the feedback sheets has been tabulated and can be considered alongside this report.

The interviews involved 20 Labour Group members, 11 Conservative Group members, 1 Liberal Democrat member and 1 Independent member.

Report Format

Firstly, a breakdown of the information from the feedback sheets will be presented in summary form indicating some of the main themes and issues emerging from the analysis of the data. This will be followed by guidance on the type of approach that may be required in order to meet the main development areas of members. Information presented in this report has been adapted or edited in order to avoid identifying any member(s) in their individual or collective roles.

FEEDBACK SHEET INFORMATION ANALYSIS

The data from the feedback sheets is a representative indication of the development needs of most members. Clearly the relevance of some topics and comments derived from the feedback sheets may only be meaningful in the context of the development needs of the individual member concerned.

a) Areas for Development

As part of the one to one interviews, members were given the opportunity to feedback some or all of the development areas contained within their Personal Development Plans. The many and various topics specified on the feedback sheets can be grouped into seven main development areas.

i) Information Technology

IT related development topics featured in 14 of the feedback sheets. The specified training needs ranged from the 'basics' to a more advanced level. In some cases, the feedback comments related more to the type of IT support required to meet the specific needs of members compared to those of officers.

ii) Communication, contact and effective relationships between Members and Officers

Many feedback sheets refer to opportunities, resources or activities to support better information, contact and relationships between members and officers. The way these items are worded indicate that some of these issues are not necessarily a training need. However, it may well indicate the need for some joint member/officer development activities with the use of additional or innovative resources to enhance better member/officer contact and collaboration.

iii) Understanding the budget/Local Government Finance

At least 5 feedback sheets referred to the topic of local government finance and/or topics related to the Council's budget. This indicates that some members would welcome more support in making sense of the Council's budget as well as better understanding Local Government finance in general.

iv) Community focused communication and related topics

Many feedback comments and topics referred to community related activities and issues, including partnership working, local area agreements, needs of rural communities, engaging with hard to reach groups. Clearly, this is potentially a major and topical development area that links in with many areas of Council business in terms of both skill and practice.

v) Leadership Skills

A number of feedback sheets made specific reference to leadership skills training (via the Leadership Academy or ACE programmes) with several additional comments relating to leadership skills topics, i.e. emotional intelligence and local and community leadership.

vi) Committee skills

Some feedback sheets specified development areas related to members' committee roles covering:

- Licensing
- Planning
- Scrutiny
- Chairing skills
- Participation in meetings
- Code of Conduct
- Human Resources

vii) Personal Skills

Some topics specified in the feedback sheets indicated development areas related to members' roles in relation to the operation of the Council covering:

- networking opportunities for members

- time management

viii) Additional topics and other suggested member support

Some topics featured in the feedback sheets indicated comments and suggestions for development activities that are specific and individual training and development areas. Many of these comments are also specific and relate directly to an area of support that may or may not be a development need for the member concerned. Therefore, these topics can only be considered outside of the context of this report. Nevertheless, it may be useful for some of these suggestions to be generalised or amplified, as they may point to an area of development useful for other members, for example, in the following:

- succession planning and support for members in key roles e.g. mayor, new cabinet members or committee chairs

- regular information briefings for members on new or changing areas of Council business.

Further discussion and consultation with the members concerned may be advisable before events arising from these topics are planned or commissioned.

b) Preferred learning styles

Approximately 26 feedback sheets included comments on preferred learning styles. In terms of duration, a number of feedback sheets specified preferences for the duration of events ranging from 0.5 to 1 day.

Individual sheets included the following comments:

- 0.5 – 1 day (meaningful and worth the journey into Whitehaven)

- small group sessions

- interactive workshop style

- practical sessions

- could include written information / open learning elements

- open, accessible and set to members abilities content media delivery

- focus on outcomes

- blend of styles, approaches, resources and techniques – innovative

- training to meet specific needs

c) Review of the Personal Development Plans

17 of the 33 feedback sheets indicated a preference for a review of the Member's Personal Development Plan in 12 months. 11 feedback sheets did not specify a time period and 4 indicated a shorter time period ranging from four months to six months.

THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FEEDBACK SHEETS

From the analysis of the feedback sheets a number of key themes have emerged. Firstly, it is quite apparent that many members are both open and committed to member development as a means of enhancing their own resourcefulness and effectiveness and that of their colleagues. In addition, the development topics specified by the members are both numerous and various. Some of these can be grouped together into related development packages, however some can not. Again, in some cases, some member development needs are not likely to be met by means of a training event. In

some cases it may be met by the provision of or change to some type of non-training and development resource. Clearly, it will not be possible for the needs of most members to be met in large group-based sessions.

CONCLUSIONS

The data indicates a preference by many members for small, interactive and practical workshop style learning settings. Therefore, given the varied range of development areas specified and the preferred learning style of many members, it is unlikely that members' development needs can be met by one or more standalone comprehensive packages of training and development events which targets large groups of members.

It is therefore advisable that any programme of development activities arising out of this exercise focus on many diverse small group or one to one activities. This approach can appear on face value quite resource intensive, however, there are some more cost effective ways of achieving the same outcome. For example, shadowing attachments for members with officers who have responsibilities for particular service delivery or service management roles can avoid the need to put on formal courses for small groups of members. Some training and development opportunities could possibly be structured to fit in with the scheduled role of members, for example, a brief training session scheduled to coincide with and link to the business of a formal committee meeting. Furthermore, innovative approaches, for example, in harnessing or extending the use of available technology (video conferencing and member/officer chat rooms for exchange of ideas, consultation and discussion on specific areas of the Council business) may assist in addressing some development needs.

It is quite apparent from the contents of the feedback sheets and the participation of the members in the one to one Personal Development Plan interviews that this exercise has been successful. However, as a result of this exercise, many members will expect to be invited to participate in future member development activities or benefit from the provision of new or different resources that better meet their needs or the needs of their colleagues. In addition, members may well expect continued consultation on their development needs in addition to the scheduled review of their Personal Development Plans.