

COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCILLOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT
JUNE 2007

INTRODUCTION

As part of the Copeland Borough Council's on-going commitment to the training and development of its elected members, all Councillors have been invited to participate in one-to-one interviews in May/June 2007, with a view to drawing up Personal Development Plans for all individual members.

The primary purpose of the Personal Development Plan is to identify the training and development needs of each individual Councillor. Members taking part in interviews were asked to feed back to the Council development priorities identified in the interviews, and preferred learning styles.

APPROACH

In total, 36 members took part in PDP interviews, which were facilitated by two former Councillors who have been commissioned to carry out this work; or by a Council employee (the Democratic Services Manager).

As agreed individually with Councillors participating in PDP's, the information on priority development areas and learning styles is to be used in drawing up this report and in devising a programme of development and support to meet the needs of all Members.

The PDP interviews involved 22 Labour Group members, 13 Conservative Group members, and one independent member.

REPORT FORMAT

This report presents information in summary form indicating the main themes and issues emerging from analysis of the data.

DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ANALYSIS

The data from the feedback sheets is a representative indication of the development needs of most Councillors

Areas for Development

The development needs of Councillors as identified in the PDP's are in the following main areas:

Information Technology: 20 councillors identified further support in using IT – the largest single area of need identified, and a higher number than in 2005. This may be due to an increase in Members' awareness of their limitations in this area rather than a decrease in skills levels. Needs identified range from basic skills for complete beginners to more advanced specialist areas of expertise – for example use of web cameras and video conferencing. Whilst the latter type of specialist skills may appear to be of limited relevance to Council work at present, current uncertainty over the future of local government in the area, and certainly if a unitary county becomes imminent, then use of these technologies for facilitating meetings of members and officers based long distances apart.

I.T. training needs to be addressed on the basis of 1:1 sessions with individual Members, rather than in groups, which tend not to work due to different skill levels of different participants. 1:1 training is quite resource intensive but this approach should be continued while resources permit.

Training on the Covalent performance management system was also identified by a small number of members and should be picked up separately on a group or 1:1 basis.

Overview and Scrutiny: 14 Members identified overview and scrutiny in their PDP's, mostly in a general sense, and in a few cases either specifically centred around one of the new OS Committees, and in one case a specific activity (evidence gathering). This may reflect some continuing uncertainty over the role of overview and scrutiny in local government and over the remits of the new committees formed in May 2007. Some members have also raised the need for overview and scrutiny to work more closely with the Executive and with senior officers.

These issues need to be addressed in the programme through bespoke training clarifying the scrutiny role and particularly the new role for councillors in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill in leading Community Calls for Action. Consideration should also be given to further team building exercises involving overview and scrutiny members and the Executive and senior management.

Finance and the Budget Process: 11 Councillors identified a better understanding of the budgetary process and local government finance generally. Additional assistance for members in understanding these issues needs to be built into the programme, possibly by building on the interactive workshops successfully run as part of the 2007 Induction Programme.

Personal Skills: A number of Members raised the need for development of personal skills in the following areas: chairing skills; time management;

mediation skills; leadership and community leadership; team building; organising surgeries; study skills; speed reading.

Committee Skills: There were training needs identified in certain areas relating to skills needed for discrete Council services. These are: planning (7 members); licensing (2); audit; standards; personnel; appeals; housing/Council Tax benefits.

Local Government and Partnership Working: A number of Members referred in PDP's to the need to obtain a better understanding of how the Council operates, the interface between Members and officers, the Council's role in the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership and the Local area Agreement. These are key areas which need to be addressed either through the awareness events being arranged by the WCSP or through further events in the programme.

Communications and Media Relations: Training in external and internal communications and in dealing with the media was mentioned by a small number of members.

Equality and Diversity: A small number of Members have referred to the need for Equality and Diversity awareness training. This can be addressed through either further training sessions or through the on-line awareness module which is available to all Councillors.

Other needs: Other training needs arising from PDP's which need to be addressed through direct discussions with individual members are further training on Section 17 obligations (crime and disorder) and complaints. There is also a perceived need for improvements to the way information and publications are made available to members. This could be addressed through enhancements to the existing member training and development newsletter and/or informal meetings or lunches where relevant sources of information can be discussed.

PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES

Most members participating in PDP's expressed a preference for learning through small groups or interactive workshops. All members with an interest in IT training prefer a 1:1 approach. A few members expressed an interest in open learning.

REVIEW OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

11 Members expressed a preference for a PDP review in 12 months and 9 in 6 months. 16 expressed no preference.

THEMES EMERGING FROM PDP'S

It is clear from analysis of PDP's that councillors participating in the process are committed to their own development as a means of enhancing their capacity and effectiveness. This is in line with the commitment in the Council's member training and development strategy to each councillor accepting responsibility for their own self development.

It is also clear from the learning style preferences expressed by members that it will not be appropriate to deliver the bulk of training arising from this report in large or formal presentations as the majority of members prefer learning in smaller interactive groups.

It may be possible, given members' stated learning preferences, to deliver some training identified in PDP's in other more innovative ways, in consultation with members involved: for example, by a job shadowing arrangement with officers in key services; by a more widespread use of open learning through the Internet or Intranet; or by joint training with other local authorities or partner organisations, following on from the successful induction programme with Allerdale. Such joint initiatives have the added advantage of opportunities for identifying best practice from other organisations, and for networking opportunities with other members.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the response from members to the invitation to participate in PDP's, and from the needs identified, that this exercise has been successful. There is a requirement for this report to be followed by a robust and comprehensive training programme which meets the identified needs of all members and continues to meet their aspirations in terms of their preferred learning styles and the resources needed to meet them.