

## **HIGHLIGHT REPORT SUPPORT FOR ELECTED MEMBERS**

### **Introduction**

The Improvement Partnership was strongly of the opinion that providing support for training and development for elected Members should be a key component of the programme.

Although a large proportion of this support was provided through the Leadership work stream, other opportunities for elected Members were offered through other work streams, highlighting the importance of engaging Members in the programme. Members were involved in the District Vision work stream (community engagement and equality and diversity projects), Communicating Local Government (media skills development and communications and presentation skills training, and the E-Democracy for Elected Members project.

In addition, several of the IP funded several projects aimed at Members through the Essential Development Support work stream. Members were also invited to attend the majority of events organised within the Challenge and Inspire work stream, although it should be noted that attendance by Members at events was generally fairly low.

### **Consultation and Development**

The IP recognised that engaging Members in programme development at an early stage would be crucial to ensuring the IP could offer activity that would be useful and interesting to Members.

With this in mind, two consultation sessions were held in September 2005, during the early programme development stage. The two sessions were held in Newcastle and Stockton to help make them accessible. Sixteen Members attended the sessions, which were facilitated by an IDeA Member Peer. The sessions highlighted the following priorities:

- Member involvement in programme development
- Induction for new elected Members
- Identification of development needs eg through PDPs
- Different types and styles of delivery
- Leadership skills training
- Mentoring
- Understanding partnership working
- Cross-regional collaboration
- Encouraging more people to become councillors

Members themselves recognised that attendance at training and development could be problematic.

Following the consultation sessions, a Member Sounding Board was set up to provide advice on the development of activities in the Leadership work stream. An open invitation was issued to join the Board, which was chaired by Councillor Linda Ebbatson, the Leader of Chester-le-Street District Council. Twelve Members joined the Board, which met four times in 2006 and 2007.

The Board gave advice to the Programme Management Team on which activities to offer to Members. The Board decided to support the following:

- Member Role Descriptions
- Induction for new Members
- Extending the Member Development Charter to authorities not yet signed up
- IDeA Leadership Academy
- Media, Presentation and Communication Skills
- A seminar series with Inlogov

The IP also worked closely with the regional Member Development Officer Network to develop the programme and communicate what was offered.

### **Communicating with Members**

The IP produced a newsletter specifically aimed at elected Members, 'The Front Line'. Six quarterly issues were published between 2006 and 2008 and was circulated to authorities via Member Support Officers. The newsletter included articles about issues relevant to Members, information about IP offers and reports about IP activity.

### **Participation and Evaluation**

There were well over 1,000 Member attendances in the IP programme.

The elements of the programme aimed at Members were evaluated as part of the programme-wide evaluation by consultants Blake Stevenson. Blake Stevenson conducted telephone interviews with a selection of participants on the programme, including 15 Members. There was also an on-line survey which all participants were invited to complete – 33 Members completed the survey and responded to a series of questions on the impact of the programme as follows:

|  | <b>% Members strongly agreed or agreed</b> |
|--|--|
| I learnt something useful                                    | 94   |
| I gained greater confidence in my own ability                | 84   |
| I developed new skills                                       | 79   |
| I made new contacts which may be useful in my work or career | 63   |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| development  |    |
| I consider it time well spent  | 94 |
| It has helped me/will help me to change my own practice for the better in the future   | 91 |
| It has helped me/will help me to implement improvements in my organisation.  | 81 |
| It has helped me be more prepared for change in my organisation  | 74 |
| It is unlikely that I could have accessed this sort of opportunity through my authority without the support of the Improvement Partnership | 76 |

The evaluation also recognised the difficulty of getting Members to attend training courses, often due to the time constraints that Members can be under.

## **Activities Offered to Members**

### **IDeA Leadership Academy**

The Leadership Academy is a programme run by the IDeA aimed at helping leading councillors improve their leadership skills and hear about the latest thinking in political leadership. It is delivered in three modules, each of which is a two-day residential. As well as providing training by experts in the field, emphasis is given to the benefits of sharing experiences with other Members.

In 2006 the IDeA offered a Leadership Academy programme in the North East. The IP agreed to buy all available places (21) and offered one fully-funded place to each authority, to be filled on a first-come, first-served basis. All places were taken by senior Members. Two Members subsequently dropped out; one of these places was filled by another Member, but the other was at too short notice to find a replacement and the authority was charged for the cost of the place.

IDeA provided the IP with its evaluation of the programme, which indicated that Members had found it stimulating, interesting and enjoyable. Members particularly valued the opportunity to interact with others and found the programme offered useful information to improve leadership abilities.

As a result of the good feedback from the programme, the Leadership sub-group agreed to offer further places on the Leadership Academy in 2007/08. Two places were offered to each authority (58 in total) and fifty places were taken up. Eight people subsequently withdrew. Places were offered on programmes in a number of locations. Initially one programme was offered in the North East and the places were quickly taken up. Some Members joined programmes in York and Manchester but it seems that many Members were unwilling to travel further afield. The IDeA offered a second programme in the

North East which was also taken up fairly quickly. In spite of this, however, not all places were taken.

Feedback was again overwhelmingly positive, but this time more people talked about valuing work on self awareness and use of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator.

There were 40 graduates of the Leadership Academy during the period 2000-2006, before the IP. The IP has funded a further 62 graduates in 2006-2008. As part of the IP's evaluation, Blake Stevenson undertook telephone interviews with five of the participants. All five attendees said they had applied their learning from this course in their workplace including:

- new leadership styles and approaches;
- presentation/communication skills;
- delegation approaches;
- working with political groups;
- partnership working; and
- political negotiation skills.

Three of the attendees said they had met people they would meet and work together with in the future for advice, support and mentoring and reciprocal visits.

### **Induction for New Elected Members**

Following the advice of the Member Sounding Board, the IP offered induction sessions for new elected Members following elections in 2006 and 2007. The IDeA was commissioned to develop and deliver the sessions.

Seven Members attended the induction session in 2006 – numbers were low as few authorities had elections.

In 2007 more authorities were subject to elections and 56 Members took part in the induction sessions held in June. Members requested follow-up sessions on specific topics to be held in the autumn – these were arranged in October but only 19 people attended.

Again, the Blake Stevenson evaluation team undertook telephone interviews with five of the attendees. Three rated the course as “very good”, one as “good” and one did not give a rating. The learning that they felt would impact on their work included:

- talking to experienced Councillors to seek their views on problems;
- learning how to get involved in projects, committees and activities;
- helping to overcome problems associated with being a new Councillor and support with public speaking, dealing with the media and engaging with young people.

## **Guide to Members' Roles**

The North East regional Member Development Officers Network identified a need for a tool which built on and developed existing guidance, such as the IDeA's Political Skills Framework, and which could be used to engage elected members with assessing and considering their own training and development needs. As an increasing number of elected Members were involved in personal development planning in relation to the Member Development Charter, it was felt that the tool should also be designed to aid this more formal process. In some North East authorities Members were undertaking 360 degree appraisal using the Real World Group's *i-governance* model, developed specifically for councillors. By bringing John Alimo-Metcalf from Real World Group in at the development stage, we ensured that the Guide included direct read-across to the *i-governance* tool to aid councillors' personal development and review.

The Guide identifies the main roles that councillors undertake and the key skills that they use in relation to these roles. It also sets out how these skills contribute to the delivery of effective outcomes for the community and the authority. The Guide can be used in the following ways:

- as a reference tool that explains the different Member roles in the authority to the public, officers, prospective and newly inducted councillors, and councillors looking for a change in role;
- to enable self-assessment by councillors of their current capacity;
- as the basis for personal development planning, or to support more advanced personal development techniques, such as 360° appraisal;
- as part of a Member Development approach, such as through Investors in People (IiP) or the Member Development Charter; and
- to help authorities get maximum benefit from external development resources, and to deploy internal resources effectively.

It was devised and developed by a team of North East officers and Members building on existing good practice and advice, and on feedback from experience elected Members, who 'road-tested' the Guide.

At least 20 of the region's 25 councils are using the Guide. The format is deliberately one which enables any authority to brand, adapt and amend it to suit their purposes. Councils have reported that it has been a very welcome and timely resource, ideal for helping a new Member to understand what is required of them. Members report that it tests their knowledge of what they do know and helps them identify areas for development.

The Guide is available to any authority on request. It has been disseminated to five regions via the Regional Employer Organisations and has been shared with many individual councils.

As the Guide was produced pre-Local Government White Paper, it has been updated in 2008.

### **Member Development Charter**

The Member Sounding Board was keen to support authorities to sign up to the Member Development Charter, which some felt unable to do because of the costs involved. The Charter has been developed by IDeA and the Regional Employers Organisations to promote best practice in Member development.

A major part of the Charter process is for Members to undertake Personal Development Plans (PDPs), which identify their development priorities and demonstrate a commitment to learning and development. The IP provided funding for authorities to carry out PDPs for elected Members, which were completed by the North East Regional Employers Organisation.

Before the IP-funding work, 15 authorities had signed up to the Charter. The IP provided funding for a further eight authorities to undertake PDPs, enabling them to sign up to the Charter – this includes one Fire and Rescue Authority. As well as this, the IP provided funding for five authorities that had already signed up to refresh PDPs and make them available to new Members. The IP has funded PDPs for over 300 Members.

### **Learning Pool**

The Learning Pool offers on-line learning opportunities for elected Members. It provides short, interactive e-learning modules in a range of subjects of interest to Members, with new modules becoming available periodically. The Learning Pool offered the IP a package giving access for all Members in the region for two years at a discounted price. Following advice from Member Development Officers, the offer was taken up and the Learning Pool was made available to all authorities.

The IP's evaluation sought feedback on take-up of the Learning Pool. Feedback from ten local authorities indicated that 587 people had registered but that only 10% were active users.

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