Member Development Steering Group

Wednesday, 29th February, 2012

MEETING OF MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Hendron (Chairman);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Convery, McCabe and Robinson.

In attendance: Mrs. Jill Minne, Head of Human Resources;
Mr. Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager;
Mrs. Karen Russell, Human Resources and
Organisational Development Manager;
Mr. Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer;
Mrs. Julie Lilley, Democratic Services Officer.

Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Kyle.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 2nd November were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Member Development Update

The Democratic Services Manager reminded the Steering Group that, at its meeting on 30th August, 2011, it had agreed to review the Members' PDP process in line with the Council's approach to the Member Development Charter and to take account of best practice approaches to personal development planning (Appendix 1).

He advised the Members that, in order to deliver the revised PDP process, a procurement exercise had been conducted to secure an independent provider who would assist in the design of the PDP process and also conduct the one-to-one meetings with Members. In addition, the independent provider, as part of the process, would ensure that officers were developed in order to have the capacity to conduct the PDP process in-house in subsequent years.

The Democratic Services Manager explained to the Steering Group that an important element of the PDP process was the 'Political Skills Framework' (Appendix 2) which would be used by Members to undertake a self assessment of their development needs in advance of a one-to-one PDP meeting. The framework, which was originally designed by the IDeA, has now been updated to ensure it was aligned to the priorities of the Council.

He advised the Members that, following the self-assessment and the subsequent one to one meeting, each Member would have a personal development plan drawn up based on a standard template. He explained further that an analysis of the development needs identified would then be undertaken and a plan would be produced to both meet individual training needs and the generic training needs of Members.
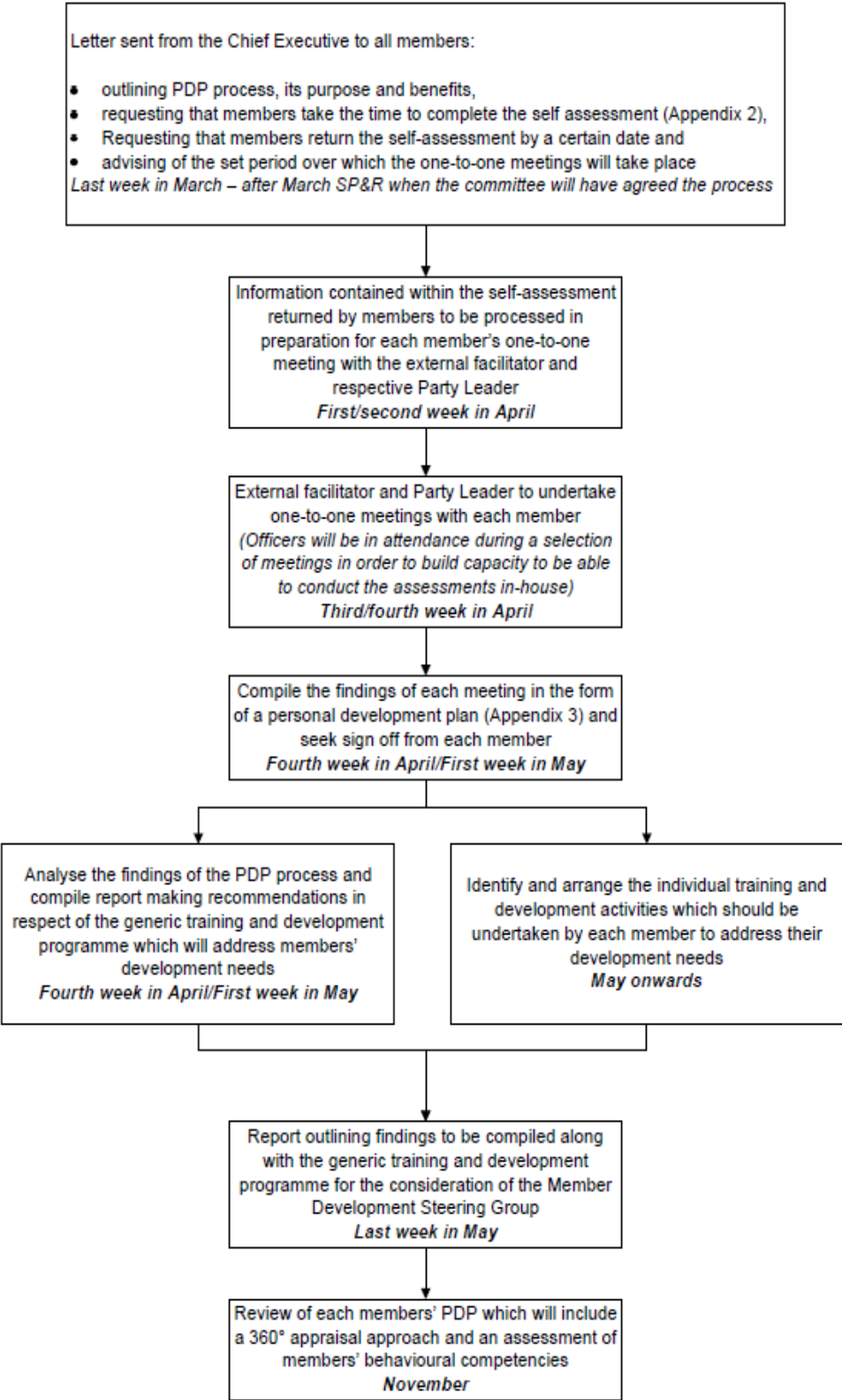
The Democratic Services Manager explained to the Steering Group that, while the skills framework set out the required skills to effectively carry out the role of an elected Member, best practice suggested that the PDP process should also include a behavioural aspect which could be addressed through a 360° appraisal approach. He advised Members that the 360° approach would not assess competence around behaviours in a positive/negative way but rather identify preferred styles and intrinsic skills. Further details of the approach to be taken regarding this 360° 'behavioural' appraisal would be presented to the Steering Group in due course.

The Democratic Services Manager reported that, in addition to the PDP process, it was proposed to design a Member capacity building programme aligned to the delivery of the Investment Programme and the development of newer Members of the Council. He advised the Members that an initial draft of this development programme was currently being designed and that, on completion, a draft would be presented to the Steering Group for its consideration.

The Steering Group discussed the involvement of the Party Group Leaders in the personal development planning process and the PDP meetings and after discussion agreed that this should be by agreement between each Party Leader and each member of their party. The Steering Group agreed the revised personal development plan process for Members, noting the above, and approved the updated political skills framework and self assessment.

PDP Process

Letter sent from the Chief Executive to all members:

- outlining PDP process, its purpose and benefits,
- requesting that members take the time to complete the self assessment (Appendix 2),
- Requesting that members return the self-assessment by a certain date and
- advising of the set period over which the one-to-one meetings will take place

Last week in March – after March SP&R when the committee will have agreed the process

↓

Information contained within the self-assessment returned by members to be processed in preparation for each member's one-to-one meeting with the external facilitator and respective Party Leader
First/second week in April

↓

External facilitator and Party Leader to undertake one-to-one meetings with each member
(Officers will be in attendance during a selection of meetings in order to build capacity to be able to conduct the assessments in-house)
Third/fourth week in April

↓

Compile the findings of each meeting in the form of a personal development plan (Appendix 3) and seek sign off from each member
Fourth week in April/First week in May

↓

Analyse the findings of the PDP process and compile report making recommendations in respect of the generic training and development programme which will address members' development needs
Fourth week in April/First week in May

Identify and arrange the individual training and development activities which should be undertaken by each member to address their development needs
May onwards

↓

Report outlining findings to be compiled along with the generic training and development programme for the consideration of the Member Development Steering Group
Last week in May

↓

Review of each members' PDP which will include a 360° appraisal approach and an assessment of members' behavioural competencies
November

political skills framework
for elected members

political skills indicator
self-assessment

Please read the enclosed 'Skills framework for elected members', which is aligned to the below proforma,
and tick next to each skill indicator whether **you** feel your development needs are:
1. **Fully Met –** No development activity is required
2. **Adequately Met –** Development activity would be useful in enhancing skills
3. **Partly Met –** Development activity is required.

community leadership	1	2	3
1. Engages enthusiastically with the community in order to understand their needs.			
2. Keeps up to date and acts upon issues of local concern.			
3. Represents all sections of the community fairly.			
4. Listens to all parties involved in a specific issue.			
5. Held in a position of trust by the community.			
6. Mediates effectively on contentious issues			
understanding the council	**1**	**2**	**3**
7. Follows meeting protocols.			
8. Evaluates arguments according to evidence and makes impartial judgements.			
9. Makes objective and informed decisions that balance ward/ area needs with those of the wider community.			
10. Monitors performance and progress and intervenes where necessary			
11. Prepares well in advance for meetings.			
12. Balances council work and other commitments.			
13. Chairs meetings effectively and keeps process on track (Chairs only)			
14. Builds professional and effective working relationships with Council officers			

political skills indicator
self-assessment

scrutiny and challenge	1	2	3
15. Provides objective challenge to processes, decisions and people.			
16. Adopts an appropriate questioning style.			
17. Analyses and assimilates complex information.			
18. Presents arguments in a concise manner.			
19. Maintains focus and distinguishes between important, less important and inaccurate information.			
20. Provides constructive feedback.			
communication skills	1	2	3
21. Listens sensitively, uses appropriate language and checks for understanding.			
22. Communicates regularly with the community using a range of methods, such as Email, letters, social media and leaflets.			
23. Speaks clearly and confidently in public.			
24. Provides regular feedback and keeps people informed.			
working in partnership	1	2	3
25. Builds positive relationships with the wider community, colleagues, officers and external agencies			
26. Makes other feel valued and included.			
27. Works collaboratively with others to achieve goals.			
28. Recognises when to delegate or provide support.			
29. Takes a long-term view in developing partnerships.			

political skills indicator
self-assessment

political understanding	1	2	3
30. Acts ethically and with integrity when representing Group views and values			
31. Works across Group boundaries without compromising political values.			
32. Understands how Central and Regional Government policy impacts on local issues and Council functioning.			
33. Supports party colleagues in public forums.			
34. Identifies new ways of engaging the public.			
party leaders			
excellence in leadership	1	2	3
35. Provides visionary leadership.			
36. Inspires trust and gains commitment to policies and decisions.			
37. Is well prepared, able to juggle conflicting responsibilities.			
38. Shapes a culture of excellence.			
39. Works across political and Council boundaries.			
40. Builds professional and effective relationships and liaises directly with the Chief Executive and Chief Officers			

skills framework for elected members
self-assessment

community leadership engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern. Mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing their district electoral area and the city as a whole.

positive indicators	negative indicators
• provides civic leadership and demonstrates a proactive approach in the development of local initiatives	• does not provide leadership and fails to be proactive in developing local initiatives
• engages proactively with community, canvasses opinion and seeks new ways of representing others	• does not engage in community activities and can be difficult to contact
• keeps up-to-date with community and issues of local concern, drawing information and resources from a range of sources and people	• keeps a low public profile and is not known to members of the community
	• is exclusive in approach, and does not focus equally on community groups or issues
• approachable, is empathetic and understanding and encourages trust	• does not have detailed understanding of local issues and needs
• provides a voice and develops effective relationships with council officers and partnerships with external organisations	• concentrates more on council processes and meetings rather than constituents
• mediates fairly and constructively between people and communities	• underestimates what is achievable and does not deliver on promises/ undertakings
• campaigns with enthusiasm, courage and persistence on behalf of others	

skills framework for elected members
self-assessment

understanding the council understands and executes role by following standing orders and protocols and by evaluating arguments and making decisions that balance public needs and local policy. Ensures progress by monitoring and intervening where necessary.

positive indicators	negative indicators
• evaluates arguments according to evidence, makes independent, informed and impartial judgements	• does not declare personal interest and makes decisions for personal gain
• chairs meetings effectively, follows protocol and ensures business is conducted effectively and efficiently	• does not check facts or consider opposing arguments, makes subjective and uninformed judgements
• follows governance arrangement processes, balancing public needs and aspirations with corporate priorities	• leaves monitoring and checks on progress to others
• monitors performance and intervenes as appropriate to ensure progress	• makes decisions without taking advice or considering regulations and wider development frameworks
• seeks to improve on own performance and engages in learning and development activities	• fails to recognise or address limits of own knowledge and expertise
• builds professional and effective working relationships with Council officers	• misses deadlines, leaves business unfinished and lacks balance between council work and other commitments
• has a clear understanding of the distinct yet complementary role of members and officers	• fails to engage with or build professional and effective working relationships with Council officers

skills framework for elected members
self-assessment

scrutiny and challenge acts as a critical friend by seeking opportunities for scrutiny and providing constructive feedback. Analyses information quickly and presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily accessible way.

positive indicators

- quickly analyses and assimilates complex information, taking account of the wider strategic context

- presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily understood way

- inquisitorial, asks for explanations and checks for implementation of recommendations

- objective, rigorous and resolute in challenging process, decisions and people

- acts as a critical friend, provides constructive feedback and acknowledges the success of others

negative indicators

- does not prepare thoroughly or check facts, uses selective information and draws subjective or biased conclusions

- fails to recognise or engage in scrutiny as part of their role

- assimilates new information slowly, focuses on detail and does not distinguish between important, less important and inaccurate information

- adversarial in style, aggressive and confrontational when challenged

- fails to work collaboratively for the good of the council, abuses scrutiny processes for personal or political gain

skills framework for elected members
self-assessment

communication skills listens sensitively, uses appropriate language and checks for understanding. Communicates regularly with individuals and groups in the community, speaks clearly and confidently in public, and makes sure that people are informed.

positive indicators	negative indicators
• communicates regularly with community via advice centres, newsletters, phone calls and local media	• interrupts, appears not to listen and uses inappropriate or insensitive language (eg shouting, being rude or abusive)
• listens sensitively, checks for understanding and adapts style as necessary	• communicates reactively and is slow to respond when approached by others (eg public, colleagues, officers or media)
• builds relationships with local media and creates opportunities for communicating key decisions, activities and achievements	• fails to listen to others' views and presents rigid and inflexible arguments
• speaks clearly and confidently in public, uses accessible language and avoids jargon or 'council-speak'	• uses information dishonestly to discredit others and is unwilling or unable to deliver unpopular messages
• provides regular feedback, keeps people informed and manages expectations	• fails to participate in meetings and lacks confidence speaking in public
• uses appropriate language to communicate key points verbally andin writing (eg letters, reports, interviews and presentations)	• presents subjective and confused arguments using poor language and style
• regularly attends meetings of outside bodies and other relevant groups	• fails to attend meetings of outside bodies and other relevant groups

skills framework for elected members
self-assessment

working in partnership builds positive relationships by making others feel valued, trusted and included and by working collaboratively with the council's many stakeholders to achieve corporate priorities. Maintains calm and focus and is able to take a long-term view in developing partnerships.

positive indicators	negative indicators
• builds good relationships with colleagues, stakeholders and the wider community	• uses status and position to exert control or impose solutions, fails to involve people in decisions
• works effectively with council officers to deliver corporate priorities	• exclusive in approach, fails to utilise diverse skills and perspectives of others
• achieves goals by co-ordinating others, maintaining task focus and persisting in the face of setbacks	• unable to work across political divide and places political gain before collaborative working
• empowers others to take responsibility and knows when to provide support	• acts alone rather than seeking help or working as part of a team
• makes others feel valued, trusted and included, recognises and is inclusive of people from different communities and backgrounds	• uses divisive tactics to upset relationships, council policies and decisions
• patient, takes a long-term view in developing networks and partnerships maintains calm and focus when criticised or under pressure	• defensive when criticised, blames others for failure and does not admit to being wrong

skills framework for elected members
self-assessment

political understanding acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decisions and actions. Works across group boundaries without compromising values or ethics.

positive indicators
- actively represents group views and values through decisions and actions

- helps develop cohesion within the group and contributes to constructive communication between the group and the council

- communicates political values through canvassing, electoral campaigning and by effectively engaging the public

- committed to developing own political intelligence and understanding of local and national political landscape

- acts ethically, understands and communicates political values to others

- works across party boundaries without compromising political values

negative indicators
- demonstrates inconsistent political values, lacks integrity and tends to say what others want to hear

- has poor knowledge of party values and objectives and council priorities

- puts personal motivations first, behaves in a 'maverick' fashion or changes beliefs and values for political self gain

- acts alone and fails to support colleagues in public forums

- fails to translate group values into ways of helping the community

- lacks understanding of how central government policy impacts on local issues and council functioning

Skills framework for elected members

self-assessment

party leaders

excellence in leadership provides visionary and charismatic leadership, is well prepared, able to troubleshoot and juggle conflicting responsibilities. Works to shape a culture of excellence by liaising with the party on policy matters and speaking on behalf of the party. Encourages co-operation and communication within the party, across parties and amongst members and officers.

positive indicators	negative indicators
• provides visionary and charismatic leadership, inspires trust in others and gains commitment to policies and decisions	• maintains personal control by imposing views and being overly directive
• shapes a culture of excellence and acts as a role model for appropriate behaviour, ethical practice and democratic process	• demonstrates partiality for own party members and uses position to promote party agenda to the detriment of wider council needs
• builds strong relationships with other party leaders and senior officers based on open communication, co-operative working and trust	• defensive, avoids making difficult or unpopular decisions and unwilling to admit mistakes
• collectively with the other party leaders, acts as the public face of the council by championing council needs to key stakeholders such as the Northern Ireland Assembly	• overly reactive, fails to plan ahead or foster a sense of mission
	• does not encourage communication with community or promote the council
• works across political and council boundaries to foster communication and encourage co-operation	• lacks public recognition as a figurehead
• well prepared and able to troubleshoot, judges what to get involved in and when to say 'No'	• inconsistent in style and behaviour, fails to 'walk the talk' or set an example for others
• committed to learning, developing others and sharing best practice	• lacks detailed knowledge of the council and fails to integrate information to provide an overview of the council functions
• effectively 'juggles' numerous, potentially conflicting, responsibilities	• does not build professional and effective relationships with the Chief Executive and Chief Officers but rather contributes to fostering a 'them-and-us' attitude
• builds professional and effective relationships and liaises directly with the Chief Executive and Chief Officers	

Northern Ireland Charter for Elected Member Development – Belfast City Council Case Study

The Democratic Services Manager advised the Steering Group that South East Employers (SEE), who had awarded the Council the Northern Ireland Charter for Elected Member Development, had invited the Council to prepare and submit a case study detailing its charter journey and the benefits which had been realised. The case study set out the key initiatives undertaken by the Council which had helped it achieve charter status and detailed also, from both a Member and officer perspective, the positive outcomes which had resulted from having implemented a robust and comprehensive member development framework.

He explained that the case study would be used by SEE to demonstrate best practice to other local authorities who are embarking on the charter journey and, given that SEE currently worked with over sixty local authorities in England, this would present the Council with an excellent opportunity to showcase its achievements and help to establish it as a leader in the area of member development.

Following consideration, the Steering Group approved the content of the draft Belfast City Council case study and agreed that South East Employers should be authorised to use it to illustrate the Council's charter journey and successful outcomes.

Development of an Online Resource for Members

The Democratic Services Manager advised the steering group that South East Employers, who had accredited the council with the Northern Ireland Charter for Elected Member Development, had, as part of their recommendations, identified the development of an online resource for Members as an area for improvement which the Council should implement. He explained that the online resource would be used for providing greater support to Members, facilitating a significant element of the PDP process and serving as a platform for e-learning activities.

The Democratic Services Manager outlined to members the type of information which could be made available through the online resource. This included:-

- key contacts, both internal and external
- email addresses and contact telephone numbers for members of council
- easy access to member related policies and guidance notes
- direct links to relevant external websites eg. Regional Assemblies, public housing providers, government departments, public health agencies etc.
- up to the minute news bulletins
- e-learning opportunities and PDP facilitation
- details on public consultation documents.

Following discussion, the Steering Group approved the exploration of options for the development of an online resource for Members.

Accredited Training Programmes for Members

The Head of Human Resources informed members that she had been requested to provide feedback to the Steering Group on an advanced diploma course on civic leadership and community planning which was being undertaken by a number of Members at the University of Ulster.

She advised the Steering Group that those Members who were participating in the course had indicated that it was very worthwhile and served as an excellent preparation for the skills which would be required by Members when new functions, such as community planning, become the responsibility of the Council.

The Democratic Services Manager reported also that options for accredited training programmes for Members were being explored with a number of educational institutions.

The Members noted the information and agreed that a detailed report be brought to the Steering Group on the benefits of the advanced diploma in civic leadership and community planning prior to the enrolment period for the next year of the course.

Chairman