

REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR

REPORT TO: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

9th December 2009

REPORT OF: Cllr Lakha

TITLE: Councillors' Support: Top of the Wish List

DATE: 26 January 2009

VENUE: Local Government Information Unit, Woburn Place, London

1. Recommendation

Please note the report.

2. Background

I attended this event with Mamta Dhand, Manager of Members Services.

The seminar was chaired by Tracy Gardiner, Policy Analyst Local Government Unit and she was supported by speaker, Charles Leslie Principal Consultant – Leadership I&DeA.

Most of the attendees were officers from various local authorities compared to a few councillors. Although all the officers were happy to acknowledge that the councillors need to be supported to do their job, at the same time many were very defensive of the service they provide. An officer from Hammersmith & Fullam said that they do not provide much admin support to the councillors because the councillors are able to do their own work by using the laptops. It was a surprise for me! I asked him if all the Councillors were trained to use IT. His response was all the councillors are in or under the age of forty-five years and are able to use their own laptops.

It was a good effort to highlight the importance of support for elected members of local authorities. By listening and talking to other participants it was clear that the support for councillors was very patchy across the country. There was no universal standard which could have been followed. Every authority has its own structure to support members.

Cllr Brenda Arthur, Cabinet Member for Housing – Norwich City Council, spoke about her experience as an elected member. Although she is a newly elected Councillor, she has the experience of being retired Chief Executive of Age concern. She told the audience that she monitors her own case work because there is not enough support provided by the Council! Although her experience is limited as a newly elected member, she made

good point that the officers in Members Support Services do not understand the complexity of the work of a councillor.

Mr Leslie from I&DeA was very clear about the support needed to be given to elected members. He spoke about the supporting councillors framework “Giving Councillors the Tools for the Job” for supporting elected members by declaration of Councillors Commission. He mentioned that although there is good direction from local authorities to support councillors, there is no framework that depicts minimum support requirements. Mr Leslie was more enthusiastic about giving training to members based on their needs rather than “one size fits all”. He also made a point that members should also think of the support staff because they will have their own family life and some other commitments, such as school governorship or other voluntary activities, in the same way as the councillors to serve the community in their private capacity.

Mr Chris Farquhar is a newly appointed Training Manager at Bradford District Council. Previously he was working for Calderdale as Training and Development Manager and he spoke about his experience in that capacity. He was proud to show CDs which he'd developed, for those councillors who did not have time to sit in seminars or training sessions. He told the group that the idea came from a councillor who is a lorry driver and who has lots of time to listen when driving his Lorry! He said that it fully supported the other councillors too. This seemed to be his big idea to train and update councillors on various issues such a corporate planning, Local Development Framework, Local Area Assessment etc.

3. Cost of attending

Conference Fees: £150
Flights: Nil
Additional Travel Expenses: £115
Accommodation: Nil
Subsistence: Nil

4. Benefits

It was helpful to understand how other authorities provide the support for their elected representatives and how we can improve the support for Elected Members.

List of background papers

Proper Officer: Cllr Ram Lakha

Author: Cllr Ram Lakha
Telephone Number: 024 7683 1034
(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Other contributors:
Mamta Dhand, Members Services, Customer and Workforce Services Directorate

Papers open to public inspection

| Description of paper: | Location |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Nil | |