



Submission for 'The Good Practice and Innovation Award for Member Support and Development'

Purpose of the Submission

This submission seeks to highlight the excellent and innovative practices that Caerphilly County Borough Council, Democratic Services have undertaken with regard to Elected Member support and seeks to demonstrate that the training and support have demonstrably improved the outcomes for our Elected Members and Caerphilly County Borough Council. It will be established that the development of the Senior Councillor Training Programme is over and above that required for the advanced level of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.

Introduction

The Senior Councillor Development Programme for Caerphilly Councillors was developed to provide a training framework for Members who hold or aspire to hold senior office.

Delivered over a six month period through a series of seminars, workshops, guided personal research, reflection and observed practice to enable participants to develop some of the key skills and knowledge required by Members in senior positions with a review to optimising performance and progression within the Council.

Background

Caerphilly County Borough Council has long since recognised the importance of supporting Members' many and varied roles with programmes of targeted training and development. Recent reviews have put particular emphasis on providing continuing development opportunities to Members to support their monitoring and scrutiny role and national agencies such as the Welsh Local Government Association, Welsh Government and Independent Remuneration Panel promote the need to provide Member training and development opportunities.

In April 2014, a four year training and support programme was introduced by Caerphilly County Borough made up of Induction, Mandatory, Recommended and Requested training modules to support Members performance and the different blend of skills, knowledge and competencies required for their various roles as decision makers, scrutineers, community leaders and local politicians.

As that programme rolled out it became apparent that although Members core skills and competencies were being enhanced within their current range of responsibilities, Caerphilly had no internal framework for aspirational training. This training gap when considered in tandem with the challenges ahead for local government decision makers and the changing face of local government, clearly illustrated the need to look ahead in terms of senior office succession planning and provide specific targeted support to those that aspire to senior office. It was also recognised that this investment in future leadership

potential was not just a consideration for the present administration but for all political groups, all members and the Council as an organisation.

Developing The Programme

Leaders of all the political groups were approached by the Democratic Services Officer and all agreed the need for the training to be run as a cross party programme. Their opinions were sought on the content, duration and deliverability of the programme. Discussions centred on how best to nurture strategic thinking in participants, what form this study should take and what level of commitment would be required in order to demonstrate a successfully completed programme.

Professional guidance was sought from WLGA on a possible programme structure and suitable facilitators and the All Wales Academy were consulted on possible e-learning modules that could be assimilated into the programme in order to enrich the learning experience.

It was agreed that in order to achieve the all round strategic understanding required in senior office, a simple seminar structure would not be adequate in of itself. To get the fullest picture of the roles and responsibilities of a Cabinet Member within Caerphilly County Borough Council the programme would need to be carefully tailored and facilitated by a mixture of external trainers, internal Officers and fully supported by Democratic Services Officers.

Seminars would be supported by briefings, workshops, practical exercises, observations and e-learning modules. Participants would be expected to take responsibility for their own learning and undertake the required preparation work between sessions.

Given the already busy training and committee schedule and taking into account feedback from Members Training Needs Analysis with regard to training times, the decision was taken to hold the programme seminars on a Saturday morning. In this way it was anticipated that Members with work/care commitments would have a greater opportunity to attend.

Piloting weekend provision in this way would also allow Caerphilly's Democratic Services to gauge the appetite of Members for work or study outside the usual Monday to Friday regime going forward.

A report was taken to the Democratic Services Committee and following their approval for the outline programme Democratic Services began the development of a learning portfolio for Members.

The portfolio was compiled to reflect the vocational style of the programme and provided participants with an outline of each of the modules of study, the preparation work required ahead of time and suggested research areas that would assist in the learning process. A research record was included in each section for note taking and personal reflection, research examples and good practice guides also were included along with useful websites links and compatible e-learning modules.

Individual briefing sessions were structured to be informal, interactive and delivered in plain language with participants well prepared ahead of time in the subject of study in order to get the most out of the sessions and provide plenty of opportunities for discussion and questions.

In order to provide best value the programme would need to be delivered to cohorts of 15 Councillors at a time with a minimum number of 10 required to run the programme.

A programme overview was compiled and distributed to all Members for comment and expressions of interest.

Delivering The Programme

The first session acted as an explanation of the aims and structure of the programme and the style of delivery. It gave participants an opportunity to express any specific ideas on content and style within each theme and provided an opportunity for the sponsors (each of the Party Leaders, Head of Democratic Services and WLGA) of the programme to set out their expectations. Democratic Services Officers provided guidance on how to make the most of the programme, including preparation and personal research.

Some of the overarching briefing sessions would be supplemented with Caerphilly County Borough specific workshops presented by specialist Officers within the field of study and participants signposted to good practice guides, websites and e-learning modules. The opportunity for first hand research including interviews with existing and past Cabinet Members was scheduled around the programme and practical exercises for Chairing Skills and Public Speaking modules were organised with contributions from existing Committee Chairs and Officers. Participants were encouraged to attend Cabinet meetings and to view the Cabinet meetings of other Council's via webcasts, make notes and identify areas of improvement and good practice.

The views expressed by Members during the introductory session were incorporated into the formal briefing sessions and were taken into account when Officer's prepared the CCBC workshop elements. The self study preparation tasks were detailed at the end of the proceeding session for the session ahead and study outcomes fed back as part of the formal sessions.

Each session was delivered within a 4 hour time slot, apart from the final Public Speaking/Media Interview training which was allocated a full day in order to complete the required camera and recording work. A Democratic Services Officer attended each of the sessions to support Members and the Facilitators as required.

Formal Briefing Sessions included: -

- Session One – Setting the Context
- Session Two – Strategic and Political Leadership
- Session Three – Finance
- Session Four – Performance and Improvement
- Session Five – Chairing Skills
- Session Six – Public Speaking including Media Interviews

CCBC Officer Workshops included: -

- Finance/Medium Term Financial Planning/Budget Setting
- Service Improvements Plans and Performance Indicators
- Chairing Skills

Practical Learning included: -

- Chairing an agenda item
- Preparing and delivering a media interview
- Interviewing present and past Cabinet Members

Attending Cabinet meetings

Suggested Research included:

Consultation Processes,

Medium Term Financial Planning

Improvement Planning

Risk Assessment and Performance

Webcasts

E Learning Modules on All Wales Learning Academy

In this way Members received a strategic overview of the national political landscape, specifics at a Caerphilly County Borough Council level, a theoretic understanding of the wider issues involved in local government and a practical skills base.

Analysis, Feedback and Outcomes Achieved

Given that this was an entirely new programme of an intensity and length not previously undertaken at Caerphilly, it was agreed that a Member would be deemed to have successfully completed the programme if 4 of the 6 briefing sessions were attended providing that modules workshop sessions had also been attended. It was also anticipated that a certain level of drop off amongst participants would occur and this proved to be the case. Of the 14 original expressions of interest only 8 Members took the programme through to completion.

2 Members withdrew for personal reasons (having completed only the introductory session)

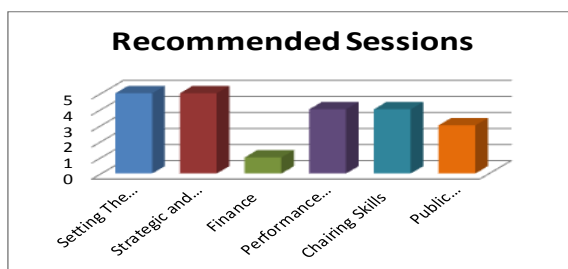
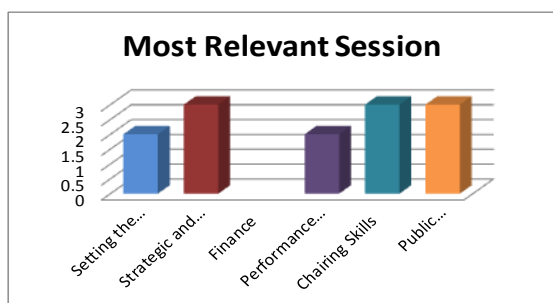
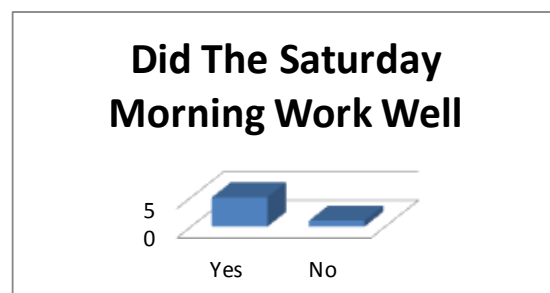
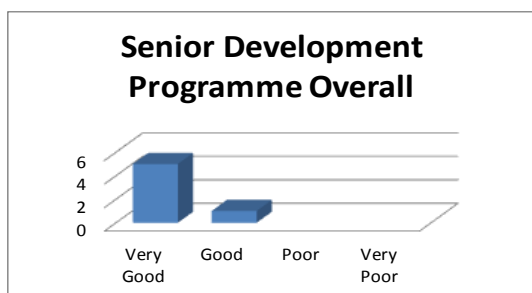
1 Member withdrew when work commitments changed to include a Saturday (having completed 2 sessions)

1 Member stood down as an Elected Member (having completed 4 of the 6 sessions)

2 Members completed only 2 sessions

Questionnaires were circulated at the end of the module and at the conclusion of the programme as a whole. Members' opinions were also sought following the last training session and the summary of those comments have been included in the final analysis. 6 out of the 7 Members that participated completed an overall feedback questionnaire giving an 86% response rate.

ANALYSIS



100% of Candidates rated the overall training/individual modules as very good or good.
 100% of Candidates rated the quality of trainers as very good or good.
 100% of Candidates felt that the detail and content of the training was set at the right level.

In order to help with the forward planning of future programmes, Members were also asked for the reasons that prevented them from attending all of the modules and these were noted as diary/commitment conflicts, holiday and illness.

All but one of the candidates stated that the Saturday morning session worked well for them and they all agreed that they would recommend the programme to colleagues.

Setting the Context facilitated by Daniel Hurford, Strategic and Political Leadership facilitated by Ian Bottrill and Chairing Skills facilitated by Sarah Titcombe and Cath Forbes-Thompson were highlighted in the additional comments as excellent and Public Speaking and Media Skills facilitated by Melanie Doel was highlighted by participants as a module that should be offered to all Councillors.

Members also suggested that the topics covered on a less strategic level should be offered to all Councillors and in particular to new Councillors as it would provide a good introduction to the role and the local authority.

“The course was very informative and enjoyable. I think that a shorter version of the course would be very beneficial to new councillors. The course has helped me in my day to day work as a councillor because of the information that I gained about the inner workings of the council. The tutors were excellent in their approach and very knowledgeable.”

The additional workshops and preparations tasks were considered to be worthwhile by all candidates and particular reference was made to those on finance and performance and improvement. Members were also very positive in their responses to the practical exercises with the charring and media interview receiving the most feedback.

Suggestions were also made that the individual session be offered to all Members independently and if possible adapted as an ongoing programme of training.

The quality of the facilitators and the level of support provided by Officers were also referenced as a big positive, Members commented positively on each of the modules, “facilitators were excellent and kept the sessions interesting”. Members also acknowledged that the programme had changed their thinking in terms of the bigger political picture and recognised the strategic considerations required in a senior office role.

Conclusion

Members that participated enjoyed, valued and became fully invested in the programme and acknowledged a change in their thinking at a more strategic level and confirmed that it had adjusted their understanding of the requirements of senior office.

As a result of the feedback received Caerphilly will now offer modules based on the Senior Programme training to all Members on Finance, Charring Skills, the Political Landscape and Media Skills and will look to further incorporate elements of these modules into its induction programme for new members.

The programme sought to provide an opportunity for Members that aspire to senior office to up-skill their personal development portfolio at a more strategic level and this was achieved.

The Leader of Council and main sponsor of the programme commented that “when we first considered possible succession planning options the prospect of providing a specifically tailored aspirational training programme for Caerphilly seemed to be the most positive way forward. I saw this as an opportunity for our Councillors to develop some of the key skills and core competencies required by Members in senior positions which would elevate thinking and enhance performance and progression within the Council.

With the help of the WLGA a varied and challenging programme was developed where participants took ownership of their own learning, they did this by working alongside the tutor led courses, undertaking personal research between sessions, attending Caerphilly specific workshop briefings as well as practical exercises. I followed the progress of the programme closely from the first introductory session to the presentation of certificates and final debrief discussions and was impressed by the hard work and commitment of those taking part.

Given that this was the first programme of its kind in Wales, of a duration and intensity not offered before, the 8 Members that successfully completed the programme are to be

commended for their dedication. The impact that this learning experience has had cannot be underestimated and the positive comments from participants have been overwhelming. The programme delivered on its aims by underpinning strategic thinking, illustrating the expectations and challenges facing Local Government and the role of the Cabinet Member within it. It also enhanced Members abilities on a practical level by developing research, chairing and media interview skills (which proved to be two of the most popular of the courses provided). The benefits of the programme have already filtered into working practice with two of the participants taking up Chair and Vice Chair roles and as a result of the feedback from participants elements of the Senior Programme have been incorporated into our Recommended Training Programme, with the Finance and Media Skills training already being offered to all Members.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the WLGA, in particular Sarah Titcombe and Daniel Hurford. Democratic Services Officers, Cath Forbes-Thompson, Angharad Price and Emma Sullivan and the various external facilitators and Officers that delivered the modules and workshops and the Members that committed themselves to such an ambitious training and development programme.”

Participants fed-back that they were now incorporating ‘bigger picture’ thinking across the board, even when considering Ward matters. A Member commented that as result of the programme he would be ‘more confident to take on more challenging roles, including Chairing/Senior Salary responsibilities’ as he felt he had a better understanding of the wider context in which these positions worked. All Members agreed that they had a better grasp on the roles and responsibilities of Cabinet Members and since the programme completion some Members have requested further information with regard to additional training opportunities e.g. Leadership Academy, which they had not previously considered.

Members, who expressed an interest in holding senior office at the introductory stage of the programme, expressed a greater certainty at the end of the programme as to their aspirations.

The programme sponsors (including the Leader of Council) at the outset of the programme looked to provide a platform for development at a senior level. The topics covered and preparation required should stretch and challenge participants and also allow them to take ownership of their own progress. The Leader of Council and Leader of the Opposition followed the programme throughout the six month period, attending sessions/workshops and provided support including briefings at both the introductory and debrief exercises.

The Leader acknowledged that the training had secured what had been envisaged and had received only positive feedback from participants, the combination of CCBC led workshops with strategic/theoretical seminars had allowed Members to establish the ways in which a local authority must function at both a local and national level and how this overarching view must inform their thinking if they are to aspire to senior office.

There was some disappointment with regard to the drop-off in numbers in the early stages of the programme but this had been anticipated given the nature of the commitment required. The presentation of certificates gave the programme sponsors a final opportunity to gauge its success and the impact on participants and the support for the programme was clearly identified during this informal get together. Members commented that it had been ‘hard work’, ‘challenging’ and a ‘substantial commitment’ but also found it ‘rewarding’ and could see how the skills they had acquired could be fed into their working practices.

As the programme has only just been completed, its impact on performance can not be fully gauged at this stage but all the Members that have participated have referenced the positive impact the programme has had in terms of confidence and changing mind-set. A Member commented that he had begun to 'lift his gaze' even in terms of in his day-to-day working.

Another commented that "I found the course covered all key aspects of council leadership excellently, with expert tutors, useful materials and stimulating participative activity. It prompted me to take a step back from the day-to-day business of our council and to think more strategically about where we need to be beyond the electoral cycle. I highly recommend this learning opportunity to fellow-councillors looking to develop their leadership capability".

A Member also stated that "this was an excellent and sometimes intense course which I would recommend to all councillors including ones who are already in senior counsellor positions.

In the first part Daniel Hurford set the wider contexts within which we all work, but sometimes don't see, as our focus is sometimes limited to local events. This was a great reminder to keep a broader view.

Part two saw the excellent Ian Bottrill explaining, perhaps the most key point of all on this course, how leaders should lead and work with others and not get bogged down in day-to-day running of portfolios where they can lose sight of the wider contexts and lose sight of their true role. This showed the importance of choosing the right Cabinet members, people who are capable, intelligent, enthusiastic leaders in their own right.

There were further parts relating to performance, finance, chairing skills etc; all of which were delivered brilliantly and all of which need to be understood by senior councillors."

A thoroughly enjoyable and insightful course which I'm sure would be very useful to many Council's in Wales."

Given the success of the Saturday morning provision, further research will be undertaken on offering weekend training opportunities when the next training needs analysis questionnaire is rolled out.

Finally in recognition of their commitment and hard work an informal presentation of certificates was made to Members by the Leader of Council and the WLGA, comments made at the presentation have also been incorporated into this submission.