

COUNCILLORS' NETWORK MEETING

(MEMBER DEVELOPMENT)

Notes of the Network meeting held at 11.00 a.m. on Friday, 18 September at Penrith Leisure Centre.

Present

Councillor Barry Earp	Carlisle City Council
Councillor Morgwn Trolinger	Lancaster City Council
Councillor Hilary Stephenson	South Lakeland District Council
Councillor David Wilson	Allerdale Borough Council
Chris Woods	South Lakeland District Council

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Liz Mallinson, Cumbria County Council.

1. Chairman

AGREED – That Councillor Hilary Stephenson would chair the meeting.

2. Welcome

Councillor Stephenson thanked and welcomed everyone to the meeting. An email received from Councillor Mallinson, Cumbria County Council, was read out in which she explained that she had been unable to attend due to ill health but welcomed the opportunity to become involved with the group in the future.

It was explained that the meeting had been called to investigate opportunities for networking at Member level, sharing ideas and discuss how authorities could assist each other in moving forward with Member development initiatives.

3. Discussion

Some time was spent discussing the Member Conference which had been held in Kendal in January and it was generally felt that this had helped to encourage Members to embrace development opportunities.

Issues discussed

Who is responsible for ensuring that Members carry out training –

- South Lakeland District Council explained that it was left to Group Leaders to enforce within their authority.

Information Technology –

- Lancaster City Council's IT department had introduced the facility for Members who were waiting for IT connections to use the mobile web on a temporary basis at a reasonable cost (about £30 per month).

Ways to encourage attendance at training events –

- Lancaster City Council found that holding training at 4.00 p.m. as well as providing food, tended to aid attendance, as this encourages interaction and social networking

- Allerdale Borough Council and Carlisle City Council both felt that convenient locations were an important factor

Joint training/ networking with other authorities –

- Lancaster had held some joint training events with Lancashire as well as Blackpool. Members attending training outside the authority were required to give a talk/ write up/ feedback on the training received to encourage others to explore the experience.

Difficulties in sourcing good training within reasonable travelling distance –

- It was generally felt that there was a big difficulty in getting good trainers who provided training within a reasonable travelling distance. Most training was held in Manchester or even further away.
- The time of day for training was also felt to be a factor.
- Carlisle City Council used a “credit” system, which required Members to obtain a set number in each year. One problem with this is that, where enough credits had not been obtained, there tended to be a rush towards the end of the year to fulfil the quota.

Political Awareness –

- Lancaster City Council encouraged each new Councillor to shadow officers under “a day in the life of?”. The Member would spend an hour or more with an officer to understand how they worked.
- South Lakeland District Council was keen to introduce political awareness training for officers as well as Members so that everyone had a good understanding of the needs and duties of each other. It was felt that this would enhance working relationships.

Shared training –

- All felt that opportunities should be explored, keeping venues as convenient as possible. Kendal or Penrith, for example, were felt to be accessible to all.

Modern Councillor –

- Carlisle City Council had agreed to extend Modern Councillor for another year. Other authorities however, felt that there had been very little take-up by their Members.

Mentoring –

- Allerdale Borough Council had a mentoring programme for new Members, which included a democratic services mentor as well as peer Members.
- Lancaster City Council provided a shadowing programme for new Members to shadow a Cabinet Member for a day.

Member Conferences –

- All felt that this was a good idea, possibly on a biannual basis. Funding of the Conference could be shared amongst authorities and funding from other sources should be investigated.

Future Network Meetings –

- The Group felt that there was a huge potential to use the Network meetings to exchange ideas and good practice.

AGREED – That

1. Network meetings should be continued, possibly on a quarterly basis, to explore what is working well and not working well for each authority;
2. The next meeting should be convened for end of November;
3. The network meetings would be hosted by each authority in turn, based, alphabetically, on the names of each authority (i.e. Allerdale Borough Council would host the next meeting, sending out agendas and completing notes of the meeting);
4. Officers should be asked to attend future meetings and be encouraged to consider holding an officer group meeting immediately prior to the Member Network meeting to explore the potential benefits of exchanging ideas at officer level;
5. Items for next meeting –
 - a. Terms of Reference
 - b. Action Plan
 - c. Shared training opportunities
 - d. Member Conference
6. Notes from this meeting would be circulated to all authorities in Cumbria, including the National Park Authority, and Lancaster City Council.

The meeting ended at 12.15 p.m.