



Association of
Democratic Services
Officers

East of England Regional meeting – 11 January 2019

Present: John Lynch (ADSO Finance Director), Debbie Janes (Interim Regional Representative, Luton Council), Emma Tombs (Interim Regional Representative, Basildon Borough Council), Sue Hulks, Elizabeth Heath (St. Albans City and District Council), Nick Mills, Tamar Oviatt-Ham, Michelle Rowe, James Vetch (Cambridgeshire County Council), Ian Gourlay, Fungai Nyamukapa (Stevenage Borough Council), Nuzhat Udin, Fathima Ra'ana Riyaz, Andrew Dobbin (Luton Council), Theresa Baker (Hertfordshire County Council), Anne Gardiner (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority), Sandra Hancock (Watford Borough Council), Wrox Rehill (Hertsmere Council), G Padden, Helen Johnson, Marie Lowe, Graham Seal (Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council), Alistair Bochel (Uttlesford District Council), Tracey Couper (East Cambridgeshire District Council), Claire Tunnicliffe (Cambridge City Council)

1. Welcome and introductions

Introductions were made around the table, with Debbie Janes and Emma Tombs introducing themselves to the group as the interim Regional Representatives during Joanna Boaler's maternity leave.

2. National ADSO Developments

John provided an overview of the aims and purpose of ADSO, for the benefit of new members. Established 10 years ago, ADSO served as the professional body for the sector and aimed to raise the profile of the profession, and act as it's voice, in particular in responding to Government consultations. John advised that all ADSO members were welcome to attend and observe Board meetings, of which there were four a year, to gain a further understanding of the work taking place.

Highlights included:

Lawyers in Local Government – close work with this group was continuing. LLG had recently appointed a new Chief Operating Officer

Not Westminster – John had attended this event, to which ADSO had provided £500.00 sponsorship, which was organised by Kirklees Council and took place in Huddersfield. Participants were largely community activists and campaigners, and it had been a useful opportunity to advise on Local Authority decision

making, and how influence may be brought to bear. **ACTION** – invite a colleague from Kirklees to attend a future meeting, to share knowledge about involving members of the community in the democratic process.

Joint working - opportunities for joint working with the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Accountants (ICSA), the Society of Local Council Clerks were being explored. John noted that there was a strong flow of staff from and to Local Authorities and Health Authorities; links were being established to support Health Authorities in their governance arrangements.

International Institute of Municipal Clerks – membership of this predominantly US based body was included with ADSO memberships. ADSO was co-sponsoring a Symposium to be held in Stratford upon Avon in the summer, and up to 20 places would be made available for ADSO members. More information would follow.

Peer Reviews – the Board welcomed requests from Local Authorities to undertake health checks, constitutional reviews etc.

Consultancy work - following a request in the ADSO newsletter, a number of colleagues had put themselves forward willing to undertake consultancy work for ADSO. John had been pleased with the response, noting that it provided a good pool to work with. **ACTION** – John to consider whether there was the opportunity to develop a “talent pool” to provide cover where needed within teams, as staff shortages were a common problem. The need for and desirability of “growing your own” team members was also noted.

Training – Sue Keogh, the Board Member previously responsible for training had stepped down, although was still active within the organization. The new appointee, Susan Biddle, was currently looking at the training programme, and details of the sessions to be provided would be published on the website. Suggestions for useful topics would be welcomed, and bespoke training could also be provided. Work was underway with the LLG to provide a range of free webinars. Sign up for the ADSO Certificate and Diploma courses was encouraged, with the next courses commencing in March. There was also the opportunity to become an Assessor; John would provide further information to anyone interested.

Annual Conference – the 2019 conference would take place at the Holiday Inn in Bristol Filton, between 21-22 November. A number of speakers had already been confirmed, including Steve Head the motivational speaker who had been exceptionally well received at the last conference. Suggestions for further speakers were invited; full details would follow in the summer.

ADSO membership – ADSO now had over 1000 members, based in England and Wales. John would shortly travel to Northern Ireland to discuss the possibility of a region being established there. NI had only 11 authorities, all of which operated under the Committee System.

3. Statutory Scrutiny Guidance

At the time of the meeting this had not been issued.

4. Member Induction – Preparation for the 2019 elections and past good practice

Interesting discussions took place in breakout areas about the success and challenges experienced in delivering induction sessions, and with training more generally. Feedback from the breakout sessions is attached.

5. Regional Training and Development 2019

Following on from previous discussions, John advised that the training schedule would shortly be on the ADSO website; if sessions on any other topics were required, please suggest them. If there was enough interest in particular sessions, these could be held within individual regions.

6. Role of the Regional Representative

John invited colleagues to consider what they wanted from their representatives, and how this could also influence what took place at the regional meetings. Colleagues were keen to see the promotion of the representative role as a conduit between the region and the board, with matters of concern or interest being fed back for consideration and response. It was suggested that it may be useful to split meetings into two sessions, with the 'business' dealt with in the morning, then a training or briefing session held after lunch. Colleagues could attend one or both sessions depending on their particular relevance, or available time commitment. The idea of continuing with breakout sessions was also popular, and it was agreed that this approach would be introduced at the next meeting, with the morning session focusing on the implications of no overall control / political instability – timely, given upcoming elections – then a briefing on the Scrutiny Guidance in the afternoon. Any further suggestions for topics for onward meetings would be welcomed.

7. Regional Good Practice

A discussion took place about what good practice might look like. John advised that the London region was particularly effective, though benefitted from being small, and therefore networking and communication was more straightforward, and providing easy access to external speakers for example from the LGA and LGIU. **ACTION** – invite the London Regional Representative to a future meeting, to get an overview of how they operate.

Colleagues were encouraged to look at the different regional pages on the ADSO website, and flag up anything that they might like to take forward. John also highlighted the "Services for Members" section which provided, amongst other things, free independent financial advice.

8. Any other business

Everyone expressed their thanks and best wishes to Joanna, ahead of her upcoming maternity leave.

Next meeting – 15 March 2019, at Cambridge City Council.

Feedback from Breakout Groups – Member Induction

Group 1

1. Member buy in from existing Members
2. Encouraging turnout – senior management team now involved / leading
3. Member Development Group key to encouraging buy in, so it's Member led. Required for Charter
4. Prospectus setting out training programme, issued pre-election
5. Induction pack of forms (hard copy). Electronic being explored
6. Market Place approach, setting out service areas information – drop in session
7. Outside facilitators seem more acceptable to Members

Group 2

1. All of the above!
2. Attendance levels is an issue
3. Quasi-judicial is mandatory
4. Councillor start-up kit – induction briefing and supporting material. Programme based on Member Development Group feedback. Limited information supplied initially to avoid being overwhelmed
5. Internal and external trainers, and external events if within budget – early issue of IT kit
6. Joint authority training shares cost, knowledge and skills

Group 3

1. Member induction programme planned in advance and issued to new Members once elected; they are required to attend. Includes decision making / forward plan. Members identify briefing topics. Buy-in from the whole authority; a pro-active Member Services Officer champions the Member development agenda
2. Encourage all DS staff to be included in Member training so that they are visible to new Members. Develops positive reputation early on – helpful
3. Training on IT systems – don't rely on IT. Assist with use of committee information system; one on one DSO training more effective than technical support
4. Develop least technical Member as advocate for use of IT.

Group 4

1. External vs Internal trainers. Officer support to deliver this – some lack officer buy in
2. Member training budgets under pressure
3. Quality of training – scrutiny is compulsory (every other year). CFPS delivered scrutiny training, but could have delivered internally – nothing additional came forward
4. Don't over complicate the training, message by bringing in 'experts' and tailor the local authority
5. Hold mock meetings with experienced Councillors to develop chairing skills
6. Scripts to assist Committee Chairs
7. Ensure cross authority consistency of approach (i.e. double hatters)

Questions / Comments

Is there an ADSO approved list of trainers?

- No, as support can be better provided in the form of networking feedback. Utilise the forum, regional meetings, shout out to local colleagues...

Holding training just before committee meetings is effective.

Minimise clashes with other meetings.