

**Sustainable Communities Event**  
**I&DeA Workshop facilitated by Graham Smith**

*“Skills and capacity needs of Elected Members and how this can be taken forward into mainstream council activity”*

Group consisted of:

2 Elected Members, 10 Local Authority Officers, 1 non-for-profit organisation and South East Excellence

***Members***

During the debate at this event, it was raised that Members need to become more involved with a greater understanding of the process.

They should sometimes step out of their comfort zone, take risks – doing things differently and be open-minded.

They need to have a good knowledge of what the community want and how his can be achieved by engaging with them.

Open access to members by officers would also greatly improve the relationships between staff and therefore create a better understanding of processes for both parties. Members need to have good listening and leadership skills.

Engagement and dialogue

- Accessible consultation (citizen panel)
- Professional support with questions
- Need an understanding of context
- One way of doing it
- Stakeholders - need regular dialogue
- Embedded – in LSP not LAA
- In Arun it is cultural, less so in Worthing
- Capacity and partnership mindset
- Leadership of LSP Influence – Equal
- Partner (LA) In Adur LSP is a team
- Who does the partnership work? What is their role?
- Representing wider community interest
- Art of what is possible – political agreement on outcome

***Skills***

Decisions, priorities and understand finance  
(implications of decisions) and resources at their disposal eg: officers/experts = trust

What makes a good councillor?

Must delegate/admit not expert/manages outcomes

Getting appropriate information

Manage officers – council as corporate body/above director

Communication – need preparation and informed decisions  
Ward and cabinet roles  
Pre-councillor training should be a pre-requisite of becoming a councillor.  
Best practice in Adur, there is an evening session held in order to understanding the role and responsibilities involved.  
Members to act as a Community representative  
Work on streets to understand issues (large % of their time)  
Liason with officers – present at meetings

**Types of skills required:**

Induction for members working with officers  
Meetings skills  
Preparation skills and time management  
Trust and organisation culture – team (Elected Member involvement in the team of officers)  
Member and officer working – establishing relationships  
Key attributes – openness, accessibility, self awareness/audit/learning not blame culture

Issue around having to read long committee reports – most effective way of briefing them on important decisions to be taken? All briefing work should already have been done, need to have an exec summary. Arun – on regeneration developments in Bognor Regis, regular Member briefings were held on planning applications and new developments. Meetings were held where they got to meet the prospective developers.

Issue around process and culture of local authorities. Adur & Worthing on 1<sup>st</sup> April became a joint officer structure, two cabinets – opportunity to look at shared service

Performance culture – learn from mistakes – comes with innovation. Need for more senior officer engagement in network

**Conclusion**

The workshop helped to establish some of the issues and challenges around Member engagement and capacity building across the local authorities within the coastal strip and provide consideration for the Network moving forward.

Some key outcomes from this:

- Building the right relationships between Members & Officers is crucial – dependent on trust
- Pre- Councillor Training something to be considered or providing more information on roles & responsibilities for these positions
- Need to be more innovative in briefing Members to take up important decisions rather than just long committee reports – not effective or engaging
- Members need to take more risks in their decisions
- Culture/Way of working often acts as a barrier to partnership working – need to change this
- Need to be innovative in ways to reach out to Members & Officers to engage them in the process