

Scrutiny Committee 25th January 2021

Training and Development for Members

Briefing Paper

1. Background

1.1 Member training and development is a key requirement for all members. The Monitoring Officer in conjunction with Democratic Services arrange the annual training programme. This training programme is compiled in consideration of the mandatory constitutional requirements, alongside the training needs to members.

1.2 The training needs of members was discussed at a previous Scrutiny meeting in March 2018. The briefing paper and minutes are attached at Appendix A and B.

2. Issues

2.1 The recommendations of this meeting in 2018 identified certain areas that were required to be addressed. This included the appointment of a training co-ordinator from each political group. Although each group has appointed a training co-ordinator there remains a gap in the liaison with Democratic Services and the formulation and continued monitoring of the training programme.

2.2 In addition to this point the Democratic Services continues to promote the LGA tools on training. This is through the training communication and to date it is understood there is minimal or no take up of these training tools. The below link sets out these training tools;

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership>

2.3 The LGA is clearly a valuable tool and it is essential that this is actively promoted, and Members engage such tools. The current shift to online training could give rise to a larger proportion of Members being able to attend training sessions.

2.4 It is important that in both the formulation of the training programme and the accessibility of the LGA tools there is also visibility of strengths and weaknesses. This could be addressed through some form of skills assessment and would be a matter for the appointed training co-ordinators and their liaison with Democratic Services.

3. Conclusions/Recommendations

3.1 In order for the above issues to be addressed it is recommended that the following is considered?

- Quarterly meetings between appointed training co-ordinators and the Monitoring Officer/Democratic Services. This would ensure training needs are identified and these are considered in the formulation of the Member training programme.
- In conjunction with Democratic Services; Training co-ordinators will be required to undertake a skills assessment with members within their political groups.
- All members to have an annual training record setting out the training completed for the municipal year and overall development.

- An annual standing item on the Scrutiny work programme setting out training development. This will ensure that Scrutiny retains visibility on this topic and the actions arising from this meeting.
- The LGA training tools be promoted amongst all Members.

Appendix A

Agenda No 3

Joint Scrutiny Committee – 19 March 2018

Training for Members

Briefing Paper

1.1 Introduction

In late 2017, officers from all the Warwickshire borough and district authorities were approached by officers from Warwickshire County Council (WCC) to ascertain how member training was undertaken at the various Councils. This was primarily triggered by WCC due to the increasingly low numbers attending training and what appeared to be a general indifference by members to engage in training.

Subsequently, WCC officers visited all Borough and District authorities in the county to discuss this further. This led to an officer working group being established, the first meeting of which took place on 22 January 2018 at which the various issues relating to member training were discussed. The meeting was attended by all authorities apart from North Warwickshire Borough Council.

1.2 Issues raised

The following issues were raised:

- Training budgets at authorities ranged from £2,000 - £14,500 per annum.
- With the exception of Stratford District Council, there appeared to be general apathy amongst members towards training. At most authorities, most training sessions only attracted between two and six members, although Stratford had an average attendance of 10.
- It was suggested that the feasibility of countywide training on key topics could be considered. However, there may be practical issues to take into account such as charging other authorities for attendees and members being prepared to travel to other venues.
- With the exception of Nuneaton and Bedworth Council (two yearly local elections) and this Council (local elections by thirds), all other authorities within Warwickshire have 'all out' elections, which placed less emphasis on induction training for three out of four years. Rugby has to provide an induction training programme for new members annually.
- Stratford held training sessions at a particular time each week. Members undertook personal development plans with their Group Leader, which helped to inform their training programme. Stratford appeared to be very committed to

training and the authority also had a well-established Member Training Working Group which met regularly. The authority also invited parish councillors within its boundary to attend its training sessions at a cost of £30 per attendee. This was an initiative which Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC) endorsed.

- With the exception of Stratford, there were no sanctions for members who did not attend training. Stratford withdraws the 12th monthly allowance from a member who has not undertaken a minimum of 12 hours training each year.

- Further to discussions, the officer group considered it would be beneficial to engage a small number of members to attend a future meeting, to gain details of their experience of training. It was suggested that a maximum of two from each authority be invited.

1.3 Conclusions

There are a number of issues for consideration:

- * Do members consider training essential?
- * Do members consider training should continue?
- * Would members prefer training to be conducted “in house”?
- * What would encourage members to attend training?
- * What are the priorities for training?

- * There has been criticism of trainers who have been engaged by this Council in the past. However, there is a limited pool of companies who offer training specific to members.

Appendix B

MINUTES OF JOINT MEETING OF BROOKE AND WHITTLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

19 MARCH 2018

PRESENT:

Membership of Brooke Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Councillors Claire Edwards (Chair), Mrs A'Barrow, Mrs Bragg and Roodhouse (substituting for Councillor Mrs New)

Membership of Whittle Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Councillors Sandison (Chair), Brader, Douglas, Gillias and Mrs O'Rourke

Officers:

Mannie Ketley (Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer), David Collins (Property Manager), Steve Garrison (Democratic Services Manager), Claire Waleczek (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Veronika Beckova (Democratic Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Keeling (Brooke), Lowe (Whittle), Mrs New (Brooke), Srivastava (Brooke) and Ms Watson-Merret (Whittle).

2. MEMBER TRAINING

The Joint Committee considered the briefing paper regarding Member training (Agenda Item 3). The Democratic Services Manager and the Senior Democratic Services Officer attended the meeting to present the report. The Democratic Services Manager presented a brief overview of the current position regarding training for Members.

The general consensus was that training for Members was essential for the development and knowledge of their role and should continue. It was considered that all Members had a duty to their electorate to undertake any development and learning opportunities, to ensure they were an effective Councillor. The Joint Committee considered that how training was delivered should be reviewed.

Further to discussion, the following points were made:

- Members were keen to be kept up to date with changes to legislation and new legislation. The Joint Committee was informed that SharePoint (a tool available as part of Microsoft Office 365) would feature a Councillors' Page accessible by all officers where updates and new legislation, briefing notes and other documents could be shared with Members. Training on SharePoint would be offered to all Members in the near future.

- The Local Government Association provided information and training opportunities on its website, including e-learning modules and workbooks. Officers would investigate this and include any suitable material in future training programmes.
- Members' training qualifications obtained through their professional employment, which provided similar development skills for their role as a Councillor, should be accepted if sufficient evidence was provided. This would be investigated by officers.
- Historically, all political groups used to nominate a training co-ordinator to facilitate any training requirements for their members. Group Leaders also used to hold appraisals/one-to-one reviews with their members and then created personal development plans. These highlighted skills gaps and, in turn, informed the training programme. It was agreed that this process be reviewed and, if considered appropriate, reintroduced by the political groups.
- Members considered that in-house training provided by technical officers which was tailored to this Council's values and way of working was preferable. Although Members appeared keen to use e-learning as a development tool, there had been no take up on the initial e-learning modules on the Council's learning platform which had been promoted in May 2017. The details of these courses would be recirculated to all Members for their information.
- It was acknowledged that this Council, by virtue of operating elections by thirds, needed to provide many of the Member training courses in its programme on an annual basis for all new Councillors. Those authorities who operated all out elections had more scope to provide a more flexible programme with the first year's emphasis on induction material and development skills.
- Publishing of members' attendance at meetings and training on the Council's website for purposes of accountability to the electorate was being considered. It was acknowledged that there may be genuine reasons why Members were unable to attend particular training and meetings and these should be noted.
- Some Members found it difficult to attend training sessions due to work commitments. It was pointed out that all Members received an allowance which, in part, was paid to compensate for any time taken away from their regular employment.

It was agreed that all Members should be included in a review of their training opportunities. A questionnaire, compiled by Democratic Services, would be circulated to all Members for them to complete.

The Chair thanked the Democratic Services Manager and the Senior Democratic Services Officer for attending the meeting.

3. INTRODUCTION TO THE DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer and the Property Manager attended the meeting to introduce the draft Asset Management Strategy 2018 – 2023 (Agenda Item 4) and answer questions.

The Property Manager gave the Joint Committee a detailed power point presentation. A copy is annexed to the minutes.

The Asset Management Strategy (AMS):

- facilitates the delivery of the Corporate Strategy “to optimise the use of our land and assets” and take a commercial approach in the management of those assets and resources where appropriate; and
- sets out the high-level integrated vision of the Council’s approach to all its property assets.

This vision will be supplemented by an Asset Management Plan (AMP) which will be drafted once the AMS is agreed (a report to Cabinet is scheduled for April 2018).

The AMP will set priorities for individual projects, timescales and a resource work plan for implementation of individual projects. The AMP will be based on the principles, developed by a joint officer/member working party and reviewed on a regular basis.

The progress and delivery of the AMP will be monitored via the Rugby Performance and Monitoring System where stages of individual projects can be viewed.

During the presentation, the following questions and points were raised:

Are tenants’ demographics taken into account when selecting sites?

The AMS is intrinsically linked to other strategies such as the Housing Strategy 2018 – 2020. As a Council, we understand that a lot of our sheltered accommodation might no longer be fit for use. As part of the strategy, a review is carried out to understand what assets we currently have, how they are being utilised and what our demographics might look like in the future to ensure that they are fit for purpose now and in the future.

Asset development is a long-term process and the Council always considers the best option for each individual asset.

Are bridges included in the Asset Management Strategy?

Assets across all portfolios are being reviewed. The Parks and Grounds Manager is part of the Officers Asset Management Group.

Garage sites in the town centre are well known. When it comes to garage sites in the rural areas, it is essential to contact the local ward councillor to understand what the demand is. Parish councils can also be a valuable point of contact.

Part of our process is to engage with the relevant ward councillor as they have the best knowledge of the area.

Does the Council have a list of very small parcels of land?

We have a very comprehensive list of everything that the Council owns which includes information on how each asset is being used. The list is linked to the

Council's Geographic Information System. The information is visually based on maps and therefore not easily shared. If members have a particular issue, they may wish to contact the Property Manager.

The Chair thanked the Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer and the Property Manager for attending the meeting.

CHAIR