

**To:** Standards Committee  
**Date:** 21 October 2019  
**Report of:** Monitoring Officer  
**Title of Report:** Member training - Agreement of principles for the 2020-24 member training scheme

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To seek agreement of the principles for the new member development and training scheme for the municipal years 2020-24.
<b>Recommendations: That the Standards Committee resolves to:</b>	
1. Comment on the proposals and respond to the questions posed in this report.	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

## **Introduction and background**

1. The provision of a comprehensive member training programme is a fundamental element of good governance. It ensures that all members are properly equipped to undertake their duties as councillors and protects the integrity of Council decision making by minimising the risk of successful challenge.

## **Current arrangements**

2. The current arrangements for member training date from 2014 and were modified as part of the annual constitution review in 2016.
3. All members are required to attend compulsory training each year on the Code of Conduct and, for members of licensing committees, licensing; and every two years on planning. Every two years following local elections this training has been pitched at a basic level and in other years advanced training has been offered.
4. Developments in the areas of members' conduct, planning and licensing have been routinely picked up and reflected in the compulsory training and also in optional seminars offered to members from year to year. One reason the training for these regulatory services is compulsory is to ensure that all members are apprised of the latest changes.

5. Members who have failed to attend the annual planning or licensing training are barred from sitting on those committees or sub-committees and Council has collectively agreed that they will forgo part of their future allowance payments. This collective agreement was reaffirmed when Council agreed a new Members' Allowances Scheme for 2019-2023 on 28 January 2019.
6. In addition to compulsory training members are offered a range of skills based non-compulsory training during their term of office. In the past this has included offers of training on understanding local government finance, how the Council works, chairing skills, media, safeguarding, unconscious bias and a range of planning issues such as interpreting reports, viability and urban design principles. Attendance and take up of non-compulsory training has been variable.
7. For all training members have been asked to provide feedback which has been very useful in informing the focus and delivery of subsequent training. Feedback helps officers to conceive the training through the lens of the member and to adapt the content to fulfil members' needs and expectations.

### **Training and development needs of members**

8. The basic roles and functions of members have changed little since the previous training scheme was agreed in 2015 although the nature of the political environment that members operate in has evolved, most notably due to the increased and widespread use of social media. To assist members in navigating this changing environment training has been provided on unconscious bias (May 2019) and a workshop on social media is scheduled for the autumn. This shift will continue to have a bearing on the future training and development needs of members to support their work in committee, in their ward and in Council.
9. The Standards Committee has a role to play in identifying those development needs and shaping a member training programme to enable members to meet the challenges facing elected representatives in the 2020s.
10. To achieve this officers supporting the Committee will need to go back to first principles to:
  - Identify the required competencies and desirable skills and behaviours to be an effective councillor
  - Identify best practice examples of training and development programmes from other Local Authorities and from other organisations
  - Canvass views of existing councillors and senior management
  - Commission professional advice where appropriate
11. Officers will continue to work on these issues and bring a further report to a future meeting of the Standards Committee, and ultimately to Council, with a view to having an agreed proposal for a Member Development Programme ready for the start of the new municipal year.
12. A key contribution to that Member Development Programme will be to undertake a further skills audit of all councillors in the summer of 2020. This could be done by the Council or by the political groups.

**Question 1 – Is there an interest in formulating a Member Development Programme for the 2020-24 term of office?**

13. The Committee on Standards in Public Life published its report on Local Government Ethical Standards in January 2019 and as part of the consideration of “Leadership and Culture” it makes the following observation about member training:

*The evidence we received suggests that such training, even where offered, may not always be taken up by councillors. We therefore suggest that a stronger role should be played by political groups and national political parties to ensure that councillors attend relevant training on ethical standards where this is offered by their local authority.<sup>1</sup>*

14. There is a role for the members of the Standards Committee in working with their political groups to encourage and promote the importance and benefit of all training, not just that relating to ethical standards, amongst their colleagues.

**Principles for the 2020-24 member training scheme**

15. In 2018 Council reaffirmed its support for Code of Conduct and planning training being compulsory for all members and licensing training being compulsory for members of licensing committees. The Monitoring Officer recommends that this principle should continue and that, as a minimum, members must attend training on regulatory topics immediately after their election or whenever there is a policy change or amended legislation.
16. It is suggested that consideration is given to whether training on further topics should be made compulsory.
17. The Standards Committee has indicated support for safeguarding training to be compulsory for all members. The Head of Financial Services has suggested that finance training should be compulsory for all members of Council as they have responsibility for setting the Council Tax base and the Council’s budget and medium term financial plan.

**Question 3 – Is there an appetite for making training on additional topics (e.g. finance, safeguarding) compulsory for some or all members?**

**Question 4 – are there other topics which should be added to the list of compulsory training topics?**

18. Currently compulsory training on Code of Conduct, Licensing and Planning is offered to all members, with basic training in election years supplemented by advanced training in non-election years. This ensures that all members are trained to a basic standard while enabling newly elected members to benefit from the experience of longer-serving members at those sessions. Delivering training pitched at a basic level to longstanding and experienced members may not have the intended effect of engaging councillors positively in the subject matter. Consideration could be given to reducing the requirement for long serving members to attend basic training, perhaps by limiting this to the year of their re-

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<sup>1</sup> [Committee on Standards in Public Life – Local Government Ethical Standards 2019](#)

election only, with supplementary seminars and advanced training offered in other years.

**Question 5 – Should compulsory training continue to alternate between basic training in election years and advanced training in non-election years for all members? Or should compulsory training only apply in the first year of office or when required as a result of a change in legislation?**

19. For training to be compulsory there needs to be a sanction. The existing sanctions are set in the Constitution (Part 26.2), these are based on a collective agreement made by Council and not on legislation. The underlying premise of these sanctions is that members who do not attend the training on regulatory matters cannot and should not sit on the relevant regulatory committee.
20. Introducing new voluntary sanctions or adding to the scope of the existing sanctions would involve amending the Council's Members' Allowances Scheme which can only be done following consultation with the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel. For relatively minor changes to the Scheme it is envisaged that this consultation could take place virtually.
21. Traditionally the provision of non-compulsory training has been as a consequence of external factors (e.g. safeguarding), to meet an organisational need within the council or at the suggestion or request of committees, political groups and individual councillors.
22. The content of the non-compulsory training is often related to personal development targets or to meet an individual skills gap.
23. It is anticipated that this approach will continue and would be informed in part by the work on the Member Development Programme mentioned above.

**Question 6 – What are there areas that non-compulsory training might focus on?**

**Induction for newly elected councillors**

24. Chapter 8 of the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on Local Government Ethical Standards discusses "Leadership and Culture" and explores the importance of induction training in setting the culture of the council:

*"The expected behaviour of councillors needs to be set out at an early stage in induction and training programmes.*

*Our evidence from local authorities suggests that induction for councillors at the earliest stage is crucial to ensuring high standards of conduct.*

*To be successful, induction training should not be dry or compliance-focussed, but should set out the rationale for high standards in public life, and should be scenario-based so that councillors can engage with concrete examples and see the relevance of standards to different areas of activity in which they might be involved".<sup>2</sup>*

25. The induction sessions for newly elected councillors are compulsory and need to take place in the narrow calendar after the local elections and before the Annual Council meeting. Within this narrow time frame the Council aims to offer a choice of

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<sup>2</sup> [Committee on Standards in Public Life – Local Government Ethical Standards 2019](#)

dates and times so that there is no bar to successful candidates who have work or caring commitments.

26. When candidates for the local election submit their nomination forms they are asked to “hold” the dates of the induction sessions in the event that they are elected. The majority of successful candidates are usually able to attend as necessary but inevitably there are a few who are unavailable on the specified dates and separate arrangements have to be made. This is unfortunate as it means that the member misses out on the collective experience and discussions and it does place an additional burden on officer resource. The dates for the 2020 induction sessions will be included in the 2020/21 calendar of meetings to be approved by Council in November 2019. This means that political groups will have early notice of the dates which they can share with prospective candidates. It is intended that there will be two sessions in the week beginning 11 May 2020, one in the daytime and one in the evening.
27. In 2018 the Council moved away from the previous arrangements for induction which tended to be heavily biased towards a series of presentations from the Chief Executive and senior managers.
28. The focus now is on a more interactive and practical programme to provide essential information about the council and how it operates; facilitate introductions to other councillors and to senior management; provide an opportunity to exchange views and experiences, including issues arising from the local election; and to ensure all the practical arrangements such as issue of IT equipment are in place. This enables Councillors to be effective in their role as early as possible.
29. There has also been a concerted effort in recent years to ensure that the compulsory training modules delivered as part of the induction programme have been scenario based and interactive. Member feedback suggests that this has been particularly effective in terms of the Licensing training. The officers leading on the Code of Conduct and the Planning training modules are also seeking to shift the balance away from Powerpoint presentations.

***Question 7 – are the current proposals for the scheduling and format of the induction sessions acceptable?***

### **Buddying**

30. In 2018 the Committee and Member Services team introduced an informal “buddying” regime for the cohort of newly elected councillors whereby each councillor was assigned a member of the team to act as their first point of contact for any issues or questions about any aspect of their role as a councillor and the council’s services and procedures. The frequency and format of the contact was a matter for each individual councillor to agree with their “buddy”.
31. Feedback from both the councillors and the “buddys” suggested that this was a very useful and effective arrangement. On average the active contact tended to last for a few months although in most cases the buddy tends to remain the “go to” contact for a councillor throughout their term of office.

***Question 8 – should the informal buddying arrangements between newly elected councillors and members of the Committee and Member Services team continue?***

## Legal issues

32. There is no legal requirement for the Council to adopt a scheme for member training but doing so is considered good corporate governance and member support practice.

## Financial issues

33. The majority of member training is delivered by officers of the Council in the Town Hall. There is a small budget for member training which has been used to pay for one or two external trainers per year as required to meet members' training and development needs in particular areas that the Council cannot deliver (e.g. chairing skills training, unconscious bias).
34. Any move away from the provision of in-house training or an increase in the number of specialist external training courses would result in an additional financial cost to the Council. This would need to be reflected in an increased bid for member training in the current budget exercise for the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2020-2024.

## Risk

35. There is a risk that if members undertaking regulatory functions are not equipped to undertake those roles then the Council's decision making could be undermined and subject to an increased risk of challenge, which, if successful, could be very costly for the Council. Similarly if members are not trained on the Code of Conduct there is a risk of an increase in the number of complaints against members.

## Equalities

36. All newly elected councillors are invited to declare any special requirements relating to the provision of training and Committee and Member Services will work with the individual to ensure that those needs are met.

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