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OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

To:	**Standards Committee**
Date:	**16 November 2021**
Report of:	**Head of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)**
Title of Report:	**Member training update**

Summary and recommendations
Purpose of report: To update the Standards Committee on the delivery of Member training in 2021 and the arrangements for member training in 2022.
Recommendation: That the Standards Committee resolves to:
1. **Note** the review of member training and development in 2021
2. **Endorse** the proposals for member training in 2022 including: a) the requirement that Code of Conduct and Planning training will be compulsory for all members following the local elections in May 2022 (instead of in 2023 which is a non-election year); and   b) the continued delivery of most member training and briefing sessions remotely over Zoom in 2022.

Appendices	
1	Member training and development scheme 2020-24

Background

1. The Standards Committee has responsibility in the Council's Constitution for receiving reports from, and advising the Monitoring Officer on, training for members.

Member training and development scheme 2020-24

2. At its meeting on 2 March 2020 the Standards Committee endorsed a Member Training and Development Scheme for 2020-24. That Training Scheme was subsequently approved by the Monitoring Officer and is attached as Appendix 1.

3. The Training Scheme builds on the rules relating to compulsory member training set out in the Councillors' Allowances Scheme which forms Part 26 of the Council's

Constitution. The Allowances Scheme requires that members who fail to attend the following training will have a reduction applied to their basic allowances:

   i.   Induction for newly elected members (new members only)

   ii.   Compulsory planning training

   iii. Compulsory code of conduct training

   iv.   Compulsory licensing training (members of licensing committees only)

4. The Training Scheme articulates an expanded induction programme for newly elected members which includes training on safeguarding awareness, finance, and inclusive behaviours. It also sets out an indicative offer of wider skills-based training and development opportunities for members beyond the compulsory training that all members are required to attend.

5. The Training Scheme reduced the frequency of compulsory Code of Conduct training from annually, as it was previously, to every other year for all members. Compulsory Planning training is also due take place every two years, with the intention being that these training requirements will apply in election years only.

6. In view of the Covid 19 pandemic and the postponement of the local elections originally scheduled for May 2020, it was agreed that 2020 would be treated as a non-election year under the Training Scheme. As such no compulsory training was held on the Code of Conduct and Planning in that year.

Review of Member training and development in 2021

7. The compulsory induction and training programme originally planned for 2020 was delivered following the local elections held in May 2021.

8. All members have attended compulsory training on the Code of Conduct and Planning. Similarly all members of licensing committees have attended the compulsory licensing training. All newly elected members completed the expanded induction programme which included training on safeguarding awareness, finance and inclusive behaviours. Unlike in previous years all training was delivered remotely over Zoom due to the pandemic.

9. Feedback was sought from newly elected members elected in May 2021 on the induction programme and the wider support they received (welcome packs, buddying, etc.). The feedback received is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Feedback on support for newly elected members

New member feedback	Officer response
i. The training to be useful and informative.	Noted.
ii. Casework / responding to residents was only covered in the context of GDPR.	Issues around the use of personal data are crucial for members. The Council does not offer more general training on handling casework as this is not something that could be resourced internally. This may be something for political groups to consider.

iii. Delivery over Zoom worked well.	Officers propose that training will predominantly be delivered over Zoom in 2022.
iv. The option of lunchtime and evening sessions was helpful.	A choice of timings will always be offered where attendance is compulsory.
v. The information sheets and documents were incredibly useful during the first few months.	Noted.
vi. It was really important to have a buddy to contact and who would touch base regularly.	Noted.
vii. The workload as a new councillors was very high for the first 4-6 weeks with casework, messages from stakeholders and lots of meetings and training to factor in. As such there was little time to reflect or put training into practice.	Compulsory training on the Code of Conduct is considered to be time critical for new members in the post-election period. Training on Planning is also time-critical for new members, particularly those who will sit on planning committees soon after their election. Officers will review whether other training can be spread out to reduce the demands on new members during their initial weeks in office.

10. Table 2 sets out the additional (non-compulsory) training sessions and briefings that have been scheduled to date in 2021, together with attendance figures where these have already taken place. Where fewer than six members register for a session officers will consider whether it should go ahead but attendance has generally been quite high and no sessions have been cancelled due to low take up.

Table 2: Additional training and briefings offered in 2021 to date

Topic	Date	# of attendees (# signed up)
Covered Market	19 March 2021	8
Economic Strategy	23 March 2021	10
Debt recovery under a Breathing Space agreement	14 June 2021	10
Oxford's West End development	21 June 2021	18
Audit and Governance Committee workshop	29 June 2021	7
Housing and Growth Deal	1 July 2021	18
Environmental Sustainability	7 July 2021	13
Housing and Homelessness Strategy	20 July 2021	8

refresh		
Introduction to Oxford Direct Services	22 September 2021	16
Social media training	23 September 2021 & 19 October 2021	11
Companies and Joint Ventures	27 September 2021	6
Air quality	7 October 2021	12
Procurement and Fraud Awareness	18 October 2021	5
Conflict Management and Personal Safety (e-learning course)	Offered on 22 October 2021	0
Chairing skills	8 November 2021	(14)
Chief Constable's annual address	15 November 2021	(18)
National Planning Policy Framework and the Oxford Local Plan 2036	17 November 2021	(3)

Member training and development in 2022

11. Any new members elected in May 2022 will be required to complete the same expanded induction programme that was delivered to new members elected in May 2021. However, officers will review the phasing of the training with a view to reducing the time commitments for new members during their first weeks in office.

12. While compulsory training on the Code of Conduct and Planning was delivered in 2021 and is due to be held every other year, it would be simpler and reduce duplication to keep the timing of compulsory training in step with the electoral cycle, so it is proposed that Code of Conduct and Planning training will be compulsory for all members in 2022 instead of in 2023 (which is a non-election year). This would also help to bolster the learning and development of those members elected for the first time in 2021.

13. It is also intended that a range of additional training and briefing sessions will be offered to members, including, for example, training on specific planning issues. Personal safety training will again be offered to members prior to the local elections scheduled for May 2022, although to date there has been no take up. Cabinet development days are also planned for 2022.

14. Officers will also look at ways to improve the level and quality of information provided to members about the work and priorities of different Council services, to make it easier for newly elected members to understand how the organisation is structured and what work is already underway.

15. To inform the programme of member briefings for 2022/23, feedback was requested from all members in October 2021 about member briefings, including possible topics, the format of briefings and preferred start times. All members who responded requested that briefings continue to be held remotely over Zoom. The clear majority expressed a preference for evening sessions starting at 6.00pm although there was also some appetite for the alternative of lunchtime sessions starting at 12pm. Unlike compulsory training, briefings are offered on a one-off

basis because attendance is optional and there is not the capacity to resource repeat sessions. However, with remote delivery it will be possible to make private recordings of the sessions available to any members who are unable to attend.

16. A number of suggestions have been received for briefing topics in 2022/23 and these are listed below. Senior officers may also suggest briefing topics. Feedback was received from members that holding fewer, high quality briefings would be preferable to holding lots of briefings that are of less interest. In formulating a programme of member briefings for 2022, officers will consider which of the suggested topics are best addressed through member briefings and which could be addressed in other ways:

- Housing needs
- Community Services
- Benefits and Welfare
- Council communications
- Food poverty (particularly child food poverty)
- Littering and street cleaning services
- Noise nuisance from licensed premises
- Oxford West End Development Ltd.
- Anti-social behaviour
- Zero Emissions Zone
- Traffic, transport and parking
- Street maintenance
- Rent repayment orders (whereby private sector tenants can reclaim their rent if landlords have committed certain offences)

Legal issues

13. 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.

14. Council has collectively agreed that members who fail to attend the applicable compulsory induction and training (detailed in paragraph 3) will forego a portion of their allowances, as set out in Part 26.2 of the Council's Constitution.

Financial issues

15. Ordinarily the majority of member training is delivered by officers of the Council in the Town Hall. Services are responsible for service-based training (e.g. planning, licensing), and may use external trainers where service budgets allow.

16. There is a small budget for member training held by Committee and Member Services 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, inclusive behaviours). This budget is also used to fund individual members' attendance at external training courses that are relevant to their special responsibilities or the reasonable learning and development of a councillor, with the agreement of their Group Leader.

17. 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 which has not been budgeted for.

Risk

18. 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 that members have breached the Code of Conduct.

Equalities

19. 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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