

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE
9 March 2023

Report Title	Councillor Development Programme 2023 -2025 – Progress report
Report Author	Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager, tracy.tiff@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers		
Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	1 March 2023
	Sarah Hall	
S151 Officer	Martin Henry	

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on Councillor Development programme for the Democracy and Standards Committee's (the Committee) information.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 At its meeting on 12 January 2023, the Committee considered and approved the introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor Development programme, starting with a programme for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4 of member's current term of office). During the Municipal year 2024/25 a full four-year Councillor Development Programme for 2025-2029 will then be produced. Work is currently underway on compiling the draft Councillor Development programme 2023-24.
- 2.2 Councillor briefing sessions have now been programmed in to the meeting calendar and these are detailed in Councillors' diaries, a number of which have topics added such as housing and planning. Should a Cabinet Member or Senior Officer request that a briefing or development session is added to the programme, one of these dates can be offered which allows for a more structured approach for the delivery of Councillor briefing sessions and ad hoc development sessions.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 12 January 2023, the Committee considered various mechanisms for identifying training needs for Councillors and these have been actioned.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes the progress undertaken on developing a Councillor Training Programme for 2023/24.
- b) Notes that monthly all Councillor briefing sessions have been added to the Councillor meeting calendar in regular time slots and topics for each session included when agreed.
- c) Considers other potential opportunities to deliver and promote learning and development opportunities for Councillors.

3.2 *Reasons for Recommendations*

3.2.1 The recommendations are intended to:

- a) Enable the Committee to receive a progress report regarding the Councillor development programme and provide Councillors with an opportunity to suggest further training requirements that they feel are required.
- b) Advise the Committee that monthly Councillor briefing sessions have been included with the Councillor meeting calendar.
- c) Enable the Committee to consider the various opportunities available to promote learning and development for Councillors.

4. Report Background

Councillor Development

4.1 The Standards responsibilities of the Committee includes advising, training, or arranging training for Councillors and co-opted Members of the Council, Parish and Town Councils on matters relating to the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Planning Code of Conduct. Councillor training is a wider issue and particularly for a new Council it is important that there is oversight of the Councillor training programme to ensure that Councillors have the skills they need to support effective decision making.

4.2 Councillor development is training and development opportunities, activities and programmes that are offered to elected Councillors by West Northamptonshire Council which support Councillors to carry out their roles effectively.

4.3 At its meeting in January 2023, the Committee approved the introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor development programme, with a programme being approved and scheduled for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4); following which a full four year Councillor development programme for 2025-2029 will be produced for the Committee's consideration.

4.4 Since the meeting held on 12 January 2023, questionnaires have been issued to:

All Councillors regarding suggestions for their training requirements

Committee Chairs regarding the potential requirements of training for their Committees
Group Leaders regarding potential training needs for their Groups

- 4.5 The results of the completed questionnaires are being analysed, along with the review into Overview and Scrutiny which has been carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the review of the Planning Service by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). All of this information will be assisting in informing and developing the Councillor Development programme 2023-24 and 2024-25. The programme for 2023-24 will concentrate primarily on a suite of development sessions in relation to both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning. The training will be delivered in various ways including externally, internally, virtually, face to face and a mixture. Contact has been made with a number of external training providers regarding the development sessions and dialogue is ongoing between them.
- 4.6 As reported to the January 2023 meeting, the proposed sessions for Overview and Scrutiny and Planning could include:

Overview and Scrutiny

- Understand scrutiny including its role, principles, and value
- Chairing skills
- Questioning skills
- Budget Scrutiny and finance scrutiny
- Performance, finance and risk
- Work programming

Planning

- Chairing skills
- Sound decision making
- Planning process and Code of Practice
- Dealing with a planning application
- Enforcement
- Consultation and Scheme of Delegation

- 4.7 The finalised proposed Councillor Development programme 2023-24 will be shared with the Committee at its next meeting on 28 June 2023.
- 4.8 Councillor briefings are held regularly and since the meeting of the Committee held on 12 January 2023 dates for such briefings have now been scheduled and added to all Councillors' calendars. These briefings will be added to and form part of the proposed Councillor Development programme.
- 4.9 Work is ongoing regarding a protocol for promoting and determining applications for Councillors attending paid for training events.
- 4.10 In February 2023, resources available within ILearn were again promoted to Councillors via the Councillor Bulletin.

5 Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress report on the structured four-year Councillor Development programme starting with 2023 - 2025 (year 3 - 4) and provide further comment.

6 Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the initial proposals in developing a structured Councillor development programme. However, when the development sessions are scheduled, it is expected that external training providers may be sourced to deliver some of the training. There would be a cost implication to this externally delivered training but there is budgetary provision available in the Councillor development budget.
- 6.1.2 There are no direct manpower implications arising from this report, however, should the training be delivered by internal officers there would be a resource implication upon those Officers.

7.1 Legal

- 7.1.1 The Democracy and Standards Committee and the wider Council have a duty to ensure that Councillors are supported in carrying out their roles effectively. This includes providing training. One of key roles undertaken by Councillors is decision making and particularly quasi-judicial decision making where there is a requirement to adhere to specific rules in the way in which decisions are made. Failure to adhere to these rules can jeopardise the decision making of the Council and result in legal challenges. In addition, the Council is under a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct which all councillors must uphold in performing their duties.
- 7.1.2 A structured training and development programme for newly elected Councillors and continuing training for all Councillors throughout their term of office will equip them with essential knowledge and skills to perform their roles effectively.

7.2 Risk

- 7.2.1 There are risks if Councillors do not have the training they need to carry out their roles effectively.

7.3 Consultation

- 7.3.1 It is proposed to consult Councillors of both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning Committees on the content of the training for these Committees.
- 7.3.2 All Councillors have been provided with a questionnaire regarding a structured Councillor Development programme, the results of which are being analysed.

7.4 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

- 7.4.1 As detailed in paragraph 7.3.1, it is proposed that Councillors of Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be consulted upon the content on the development sessions specific to Overview and Scrutiny.

7.5 Climate Impact

7.5.1 There are no immediate climate implications arising from this report.

7.6 Community Impact

7.6.1 There are no immediate community implications arising from this report.

7.7 Background Papers

Members' induction programme 2021/2022

Democracy and Standards Committee - agenda and minutes - 27 January 2022, 28 July 2022 and 12 January 2023

Report following the review of Overview and Scrutiny by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

Report following the review of Planning by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS)