

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

15 June 2023

Report Title	Councillor Development Programme 2023 -2025 – Progress report
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List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

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

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 As reported to the March 2023 meeting, the Member Development programme for 2023/2024 will concentrate mainly on training for Planning Members and training for Overview and Scrutiny.
- 2.2 It was agreed at the meeting held in March 2023 that the 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

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes the further progress undertaken on developing a Councillor Training Programme for 2023/24.
- b) 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) 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 As reported to the meeting of the Committee that took place in March 2023 questionnaires have been issued to all Councillors regarding suggestions for their training requirements, a further questionnaire was issued to Committee Chairs regarding the potential requirements of training for their Committees and to Group Leaders regarding potential training needs for their Groups.
- 4.4 The results of the completed questionnaires have been 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). This information assisted in informing and developing the Councillor Development programme 2023-24 in respect of Planning training and Overview and Scrutiny training. The programme for 2023-

24 will concentrate primarily on a suite of development sessions in relation to both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning.

- 4.5 Mandatory training for Members and substitute Members of the Planning Committees has been scheduled for 6 June 2023 and will be delivered by senior internal officers together with a highly recommended external training provider. The training will be delivered face to face at the Offices at the Guildhall. Officers will deliver a repeat session to those Members who are unable to attend on 6 June 2023.
- 4.6 Contact has been made with the Deputy Chief Executive of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny regarding a suite of training for Overview and Scrutiny to be delivered from late summer/early autumn onwards. The training will include sessions such as:

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

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. The mandatory training for Planning Committee Members will be co delivered by senior internal officers and an external training provider.
- 6.1.2 There is a resource implication upon the Officers delivering the mandatory Planning Committee Member training.

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.

7.2.2 The training for Members of the Planning Committees is mandatory and Officer will deliver a repeat session to any Councillors that are unable to attend on 6 June 2023.

7.3 Consultation

7.3.1 All Planning Committee Members have been advised of details of the mandatory training that is scheduled for 6 June 2023.

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 The Triangulation Group, that comprises Cabinet Members and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which held its inaugural meeting on 21 May 2023 was 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, 12 January 2023 and 9 March 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)