

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

12 September 2023

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

Appendix A Councillor Development Feedback Form

Appendix B Proforma for Members attending Conferences and external courses

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 both the March and June 2023 meetings of this Committee, the Member Development programme for 2023/2024 will concentrate mainly on training for Planning Members and training for Overview and Scrutiny.
- 2.2 The mandatory training for Planning Committee members took place during June 2023 and all members and named substitute members of the Planning Committees have received the required training.
- 2.3 A suite of training for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees commenced in July 2023 and will be externally delivered by senior Officers of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS): the training has been tailored to the Council's requirements in order to reflect the improvement plans for Overview and Scrutiny. The schedule will include:

- Understand scrutiny including its role, principles, and value
- Chairing skills
- Questioning skills

- Budget Scrutiny and finance scrutiny
- Performance, finance, and risk
- Work programming

- 2.4 All newly appointed members and named substitute members of the Licensing Committee have received the required training to enable them to sit on this Committee and Hearings Panels.
- 2.5 Other training and briefings will be offered to Members during the year. Further details are contained within section 4 of this report.
- 2.6 A draft feedback form for Councillors to complete following each development session has been produced for the Committee's consideration and approval.
- 2.7 A number of requests have been received by Democratic Services by Councillors for them to attend externally delivered courses, conferences and seminars. Such sessions incur a cost varying from £200 to £500 plus travel costs. A draft proforma for Members' attendance at such conferences is attached at Appendix B for the Committee's consideration and approval.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:
- Notes and provides comment on the further progress undertaken on developing a Councillor Training Programme for 2023/24.
 - Considers other potential opportunities to deliver and promote learning and development opportunities for Councillors.
 - Confirms that training for all Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee on the process for Hearing sub-Committees is scheduled as soon as possible and delivered by the Monitoring Officer.
 - Considers for approval the Councillor Training Session Feedback form, at **Appendix A**.
 - Considers for approval the Proforma for Members' attendance at external conferences, seminars and courses at **Appendix B**.
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3.2 *Reasons for Recommendations*

- 3.2.1 The recommendations are intended to:
- 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.
 - Enable the Committee to consider the various opportunities available to promote learning and development for Councillors.

- c) Ensure all Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee are training on the process for Hearing sub-Committees.
- d) Ensure that feedback is received and analysed on the various training sessions delivered to Members which will make sure that the Councillor Development Programme is as effective and efficient as it can be.
- e) Ensure there is a clear and transparent process in place for the approval of Members attendance at external conferences, seminars and courses.

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 includes training and development opportunities as well as activities, programmes and briefings that are offered to elected Councillors by West Northamptonshire Council which support Councillors to carry out their roles effectively. A well-designed training programme helps to ensure decision making is robust and contributes to the effective management of risks identified by the Council.
- 4.3 As reported to the meetings of the Committee that took place in March and June 2023 questionnaires were 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 as the programme for 2023-24 will concentrate primarily on a suite of development sessions in relation to both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning. The cost for this training is detailed in section 6.1 of this report.

Mandatory Training - Planning Committee Members

- 4.5 Mandatory training for Members and named substitute Members of the Planning Committees took place in June 2023 and two identical sessions were held in order that all Members could attend. It was delivered by senior internal officers together with a highly recommended external training provider. All Members and named substitute Members to the Planning Committees have received the required training. In addition, a number of Councillors who are not members or substitute Members of a Planning Committee attended one of the training sessions. Feedback received from these sessions were that it was well received and it has led to an improvement in debate and decision making undertaken at the Committee meetings.

4.6 There is a need to gather feedback following each training session, which will assist Officers and this Committee when arranging further training and engaging external training providers. A draft feedback form is attached at **Appendix A** for the Committee's consideration and approval. Once approved Democratic Services will use this form to gather data and report back to this Committee periodically.

LGA training - Planning

4.7 In addition to the mandatory training for Members of Planning Committees as detailed in paragraph 4.5; discussions have been ongoing with Local Government Support Officers at the LGA regarding further training. The training will be around behaviours, questioning techniques, how to deal with officers appropriately in planning committee and how to be effective in a planning committee. A training plan is being drafted by Officers at the LGA and will be scheduled into the programme for Members and named substitute Members of the Planning Committees. The training plan will be delivered by the LGA. This training schedule will incur a cost.

Overview and Scrutiny Training

4.8 The Deputy Chief Executive of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny produced a schedule for a suite of training for Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) that will be delivered from July 2023 to November 2023. This suite of training was compiled in accordance with the recommendations proposed in the review of the Overview and Scrutiny structure at WNC undertaken by the CfGS.

4.9 The Deputy Chief Executive will deliver the majority of the sessions himself:

Scrutiny essentials	19 July 2023
Financial and Budget Scrutiny	21 September 2023
Performance, finance, and risk review exercise	26 September 2023
Questioning skills and making committee meetings more effective (2 sessions)	9 & 12 October 2023
Work Programming (4 sessions)	16, 18 & 30 October and 6 November 2023

4.10 Following completion of the suite of O&S training, the training provider will review feedback and ascertain whether he should recommend any further training sessions.

4.11 All sessions are now scheduled to commence at 5pm and will be held remotely. The training provider had initially proposed that the session on "*questioning skills and making Committee meetings more effective*" should be a full day's session and could be held face to face. He further suggested that the session around "*work programming*" should be held over two full day sessions and again could be a face-to-face training session. Following individual feedback from a number of members, it appeared that the proposed daytime sessions were not convenient and the proposed venue was not felt to be suitable either. Therefore, following discussion with the training provider, some of the sessions were split into a number of shorter sessions scheduled to commence at 5pm and held remotely. Due to the fact some of the sessions have been moved to an evening slot, some Councillors are not able to make these due to other conflicting meetings such as Parish Council meetings. Officers have done their best to manage this, but it has not always been possible to avoid conflicts.

- 4.12 The training provider has confirmed that it is acceptable to record the sessions. A copy of the recording, along with presentations given will be available for Members in the Councillor Development Teams channel. A library of Councillor training session is available in this Teams channel which is a useful reference tool for Members.

Mandatory Training - Licensing

- 4.13 All Members and named substitute Members appointed to the Licensing Committee are required to attend mandatory training before they can sit on the Licensing Committee. In 2023/24 there were three newly appointment Members to the Licensing Committee and two newly appointed substitutes. One Councillor attended a full day's training session hosted by the Institute of Licensing on 26 May 2023. The date was not convenient to other Members and a session was delivered on 3 August 2023 by the Principal Lawyer (Licensing) to the other Members and substitute Members. All Members and substitute Members to the Licensing Committee have received the required training.

Training for Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee - Hearing sub-Committees

- 4.14 Prior to the Hearing Sub Committee (Hearings Panel) that took place in March 2023, the Director of Legal and Democratic delivered comprehensive training to the Members of that Hearings Panel.
- 4.13 It is suggested that training for all Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee on the process for Hearing sub-Committees is scheduled and delivered by the Monitoring Officer.

Training for the Audit Committee

- 4.15 At the June 2023 meeting of the Standards and Democracy Committee, the Chair of the Audit Committee, also a member of the Standards and Democracy Committee, asked whether there was training available specific to Members of the Audit Committee. This request was agreed by the Committee. Officers have been in dialogue with the Section 151 Officer and Deputy Section 151 Officer regarding potential training. Details of which will be provided to the meeting. The training could incur a cost if it is delivered by an external training provider.

Individual Councillor requests to attend external training and conferences

- 4.16 There is a need for a process to be in place for the consideration of requests from individual members to attend external training sessions. Such requests will need to be carefully assessed in order to avoid exceeding the allocated budget for this year. Previously, requests from Councillors to attend events have been received by Democratic Services, such as: events on as improving support to care leavers, Westminster Forum - Improving Childcare Services and WEdF policy conference - Tackling abuse and sexual misconduct in the education system. The requests were from Councillors that did not have specific responsibility for these areas, either as a Cabinet Member or a Committee chair. There was a cost to attend these events. Therefore, a proforma has been drafted and is attached at **Appendix B** for the Committee's consideration and approval. The proforma will assist in managing the requests for attendance at various external conferences and training events. It is proposed that requests will be considered by the Head of Democratic and Elections in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee. Criteria has been put together that will assist the Head of Democrat and Elections in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee to consider each request against the set criteria:

Training Priorities

Priority 1- Training specifically identified as necessary to be provided by the Committee.

Priority 2 - Training relevant to the specific functions of the Councillor and to support their ability to carry out those functions. For example: Cabinet/Scrutiny function

Priority 3 Training relevant to a particular issue in the ward of the Councillor, for example planning relating to a specific type of development happening in the Councillor's ward.

4 Training which is of personal interest to the Councillor

Generic Member training/briefings

- 4.17 The Committee is asked to consider whether it feels there is a need for training, or briefings, to be delivered on various issues such as housing or Place for example and whether ICT training would be useful to Members.
- 4.18 Officers from Democratic Services have offered and can host more sessions on the Committee Meeting management system - Mod.Gov, how it works and its various features. A video on how the app. Works is published on the Members' area on the Intranet and a short slide deck has been produced that details the key features of the app. and how they can be used. If the Committee feels these would be useful further drop- in sessions for Councillors could be scheduled. Officers could, at these sessions, provide short training on other IT packages such as Microsoft Office if this would be useful.
- 4.19 Dates are reserved in the Councillor Meeting calendar for monthly briefings. The dates are issued to Members calendars and then updated when Cabinet Members or Officers request that a briefing is given. So far this year briefings have been delivered on the following topics:
- Planning - varying topics
 - Housing and Planning
 - Community Safety
- 4.20 The briefing sessions are mainly held remotely and usually commence at 5pm.
- 4.21 Other Councillor sessions and events have been scheduled and include Enforcement S106 and CIL - Councillor Engagement" sessions. These sessions are held regularly and alternate between the Guildhall, Northampton and the Forum at Towcester. The facility for Members to dial in remotely is available also if required.
- 4.22 The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Transport, Transport, Highways & Waste has held one briefing session on areas within his portfolio with another scheduled over the summer.
- 4.23 The Councillor Development Programme for 2024/2025 will potentially contain fewer training sessions than previously due to the fact that it will be ahead of the Local elections for West Northamptonshire scheduled for May 2025. However, briefings that may be of use to members will continue. A comprehensive induction programme for Members from May 2025 will be drafted and presented to this Committee during 2024 for discussion and approval. External expert trainers can then be engaged ahead of the Induction Programme being rolled out in May 2025.

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 comment.

6 Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the proposals in further developing a structured Councillor development programme. However, when the development sessions were scheduled for Planning and Overview and Scrutiny, external training providers were sourced for this training. The total cost of the training was £10,400. There is now limited budget available for further Councillor training for 2023/24, from the total budget of £15,531. There will be a cost to the proposed training to be delivered by Officers of the LGA as detailed in paragraph 4.6. There could also be a cost to the training for the Audit Committee should this be delivered by an external training provider. In considering requests from individual members to attend external training sessions, the Head of Democratic and Elections in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee will consider such requests against the priority matrix. They will also give consideration to the available budget against such requests.
- 6.1.2 As training sessions generally take place in the evenings, there is a resource implication on the officers internally delivering training and hosting briefings.

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 the 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 receive the training, they need to carry out their roles effectively.
- 7.2.2 The training for Members of the Planning Committees and Licensing Committee is mandatory. Without this training Members would not be able to sit on the Committees or Hearings Panels.

- 7.2.3 It is important for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to attend the suite of training being delivered by the CfGS. These sessions have been rescheduled in order that attendance is maximised.
- 7.2.4 Training for all Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee on the Hearing Sub Committee (Hearings Panel) process is important to ensure that all Members understand and are trained on the procedure.

7.3 Consultation

- 7.3.1 All Members and named substitute Members of the Planning Committees attended the mandatory training and were advised in advance of the dates.
- 7.3.2 A number of members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees conveyed concern regarding the scheduling of full day training sessions and these training sessions were re arranged, following this feedback.
- 7.3.3 All Councillors have been provided with a questionnaire regarding a structured Councillor Development programme, the results of which have been analysed.
- 7.3.4 Members and named substitute Members to the Licensing Committee were consulted on dates for the mandatory training and the training scheduled accordingly. They were also offered external training delivered by the Institute of Licensing, but the date was only suitable to one Member who attended this training.

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 on the content on the development sessions specific to Overview and Scrutiny. A further update was provided to the Triangulation Group at its meeting held in July 2023.

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, 9 March 2023 and 15 June 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)