

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
**24 January 2024**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Councillor Development Programme 2023 -2025 – Progress report</b>
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**List of Appendices**

**Appendix A - Statistics Member Development and Member briefing**

**1. Purpose of Report**

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- 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**

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- 2.1 As reported to the March, June and September 2023 meetings of this Committee, the Member Development programme for 2023/2024 concentrated 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. A further mandatory training session for Planning Committee members around that concentrated on meeting management, questioning skills and behaviours at the meetings of Planning Committee took place in November 2023. All session were delivered by expert Planning training providers.
- 2.3 A suite of training for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees commenced in July 2023 and concluded in November 2023. It was externally delivered by senior Officers of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS): the training had been tailored to the Council's requirements in order to reflect the improvement plans for Overview and Scrutiny as proposed by the CfGS. The schedule included:

- 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. A training session was held on 20 December 2023 for all members and named substitute members of the Licensing Committee. This training session concentrated on new Taxi Licensing Policies.
- 2.5 Dates for monthly member briefings are including in the Councillor meeting diary and topics added to these as requests are received. There has been a full Member briefing programme this year will be offered to Members during the year which has been well attended. Further details are contained within section 4 of this report.

### **3. Recommendations**

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3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes and provides comment on the further progress undertaken on the Councillor Training Programme for 2023/24 and takes into consideration feedback received regarding the delivery and training providers of key Councillor Development sessions.
- b) Approves the delivery of future Councillor Development sessions by internal Officers, different external training providers or a mix of both.
- c) Considers other potential opportunities to deliver and promote learning and development opportunities for Councillors.
- d) Confirms 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.

#### **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, noting feedback received, 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.
- c) Ensure all Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee are training on the process for Hearing sub-Committees.

## **4. Report Background**

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### **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.

### **Mandatory Training - Planning Committee Members**

- 4.3 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.

### **LGA training delivered training - Planning**

- 4.4 In addition to the mandatory training for Members of Planning Committees as detailed above; discussions took place with Local Government Support Officers at the LGA regarding further training. A training plan was produced by Officers of the LGA. The training was around behaviours, questioning techniques, how to deal with officers appropriately in planning committee meetings and how to be effective in a planning committee. The training was held on 20 November 2023 and was delivered by the Officers of the LGA together with a peer member.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Training**

- 4.5 The Deputy Chief Executive of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) produced a schedule for a suite of training for Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) that was delivered remotely 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.
- 4.6 The Deputy Chief Executive delivered 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

- 4.7 Now the suite of O&S training has concluded the training provider will review feedback and ascertain whether he should recommend any further training sessions, no further correspondence has been received from the CfGS in this respect, therefore, it has been concluded that they will not be proposing any further training on Overview and Scrutiny.
- 4.8 The training provider confirmed that it was acceptable to record the sessions. A copy of the recording, along with presentations given is available for Members in the Councillor Development Teams channel.
- 4.9 A library of Councillor training session is available in this Teams channel which is a useful reference tool for Members.

### **Mandatory Training - Licensing**

- 4.10 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.
- 4.11 Further mandatory licensing training for all Members of the Licensing Committee, and named substitutes was scheduled for 20 December 2023 and was around new Taxi Licensing Policies. The training was externally delivered by a Licensing expert. Only eight members of the Licensing Committee, including a named substitute member attended the training.
- 4.12 A further session was held on 9 January 2024 to provide an additional opportunity for Members to be trained but only three Members attended the training. Members who did not attend the training were not permitted to sit on the Committee that took place on 9 January 2024.

### **Feedback**

- 4.13 Feedback received from Members regarding the Planning Committee training and the training regarding Overview and Scrutiny that had been externally delivered by recommended experts in the fields, was somewhat negative. A number of Councillors had not found these sessions useful or the delivery style used by the external training providers. Therefore, discussions will take place regarding the delivery of future Member training sessions, which could therefore be delivered by internal Officers, different external training providers or a mix of both.

## **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.
- 4.15 Council at its November 2023 meeting approved the updated Member Complaints procedure. It is suggested that training for all Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee, and named substitute members, on the process for Hearing sub-Committees is scheduled and delivered by the Monitoring Officer.

### **Generic Member briefings**

- 4.16 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
- 4.17 The briefing sessions are mainly held remotely and usually commence at 5pm. They last around 1 hour to 1.5 hours. The sessions are recorded and stored in the Member Development Teams channel that all Members can access.
- 4.18 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.
- 4.19 The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Transport, Transport, Highways & Waste has held one briefing session on areas within his portfolio with another scheduled shortly.
- 4.20 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. Dates have continued to be reserved in the calendar for such briefings.
- 4.21 A comprehensive induction programme for Members from May 2025 will be drafted and presented to this Committee later in 2024 for discussion and approval. Internal and external expert trainers can then be engaged ahead of the Induction Programme being rolled out in May 2025.

## **5 Issues and Choices**

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- 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)**

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## **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 this training. The total cost of the training was £10,400. There is now limited budget available for further Councillor training for the remainder of the budget for 2023/24, from the total budget of £15,531. There was also a cost to the training delivered by Officers of the LGA on Planning issue and the training delivered to Licensing Committee Members.
- 6.1.2 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 considers such requests against the priority matrix. They also give consideration the available budget against such requests.
- 6.1.3 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 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. . A risk was identified for the mandatory Licensing Committee as not all members of the Committee attended and therefore those who did not attend were not able to sit on the Licensing Committee that took place on 9 January 2024.
- 7.2.3 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. The same applied to the mandatory training for Licensing Committee members and named substitutes. Changes were made to the schedule of suite of training for Overview and Scrutiny in accordance with Members' availability.
- 7.3.2 Councillors were asked to complete a feedback form after each Councillor Development session and comments received have been analysed. They will be further considered when the Councillor Induction Programme 2025 is drafted and training providers, either internal, external or a mix are identified.
- 7.3.3 All Councillors have been provided with a questionnaire regarding a structured Councillor Development programme, the results of which have been analysed.

#### **7.4 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**

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Members' induction programme 2021/2022

Democracy and Standards Committee - agenda and minutes - 27 January 2022, 28 July 2022, 12 January 2023, 9 March 2023, 15 June 2023 and 12 September 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)