

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
**12 JANUARY 2023**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Councillor Development</b>
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**List of Appendices**

**Appendix A – Councillor development session statistics**

**1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1 This report provides an update on Councillor training for the Democracy and Standards Committee's (the Committee) information and seeks support for the requirements in relation to the Councillor development programme 2023 – 2025.

**2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 Details of training and briefings that Councillors have received since May 2022 were reported to the meeting of the Committee in July 2022. Appendix A provides the statistics for Councillor development sessions that have been held since May 2021.
- 2.2 Councillors are asked to consider the introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor Development programme, starting with a programme for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4). During the Municipal year 2-24/25 a full four-year Councillor Development Programme for 2025-2029 could then also be produced for the Committee's consideration.
- 2.3 Councillor briefing sessions have been held regularly since May 2021 and it is felt there is a need to programme these into the Councillor development programme by scheduling monthly sessions in the calendar. The topic for each session will then be added closer to the date of the briefing session. This will allow for a more structured approach for the delivery of Councillor briefing sessions.

- 2.4 Personal development is important for Councillors and the Committee is asked to consider the mechanisms for identifying training needs for Councillors.

### **3. Recommendations**

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3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Approve 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.
- b) Notes that monthly all Councillor briefing sessions will be added to the Councillor meeting calendar in regular time slots and topics for each session included when agreed.
- c) Agrees the mechanism for identifying training needs for Councillors (see paragraph 4.11).
- d) 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 details 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 introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor Development Programme for West Northamptonshire Councillors.
- c) Advise the Committee that monthly Councillor briefing sessions will be included with the Councillor meeting calendar.
- d) Enable the Committee to suggest various methods of identifying training needs for Councillors regarding their personal development.
- e) Enable the Committee to consider the various opportunities available to promote learning and development for Councillors.

### **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 is training and development opportunities, activities and programmes that offered to elected Councillors by West Northamptonshire Council which support Councillors to carry out their roles effectively.
- 4.3 The induction programme for Councillors that was held from May 2021 was very comprehensive and informative for Councillors. Since its completion, development sessions such as the following have been delivered as required (as detailed in Appendix A):
- Code of Conduct training
  - Code of Conduct training in relation to Planning
  - Planning Committee training
  - Licensing Committee training for Councillors newly appointed to the Licensing Committee
  - Planning Committee training for Councillors newly appointed to a Planning Committee
- 4.4 At its meeting in January 2022, the Committee resolved that any refresher training for Councillors of Planning Committees and the Licensing Committees would be mandatory and this has been communicated to Councillors. Such refresher training will continue to be programmed into the Councillor Development programme as required.
- 4.5 It is proposed to prepare a four year rolling Councillor development programme, starting with a programme for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4 of Member's current terms of office). A full four-year Councillor development programme for 2025-2029 would then be produced for the Committee's consideration in 2024.
- 4.6 The following topics have been identified as priority areas for Councillor development in 2023/2024 and it is proposed that a series of sessions that focus specifically on these areas to build and develop Councillors skills and knowledge be incorporated into the Councillor development programme:
- Overview and Scrutiny
  - Planning
- 4.7 The proposed sessions 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

- 4.8 Following comments from Councillors upon consideration of this report and after meetings with the Councillors of Overview and Scrutiny and Planning Committees, a draft Member development programme for 2023 – 2025 will be prepared and presented to a meeting of this Committee for consideration and approval.
- 4.9 It is also proposed that Officers will review reports provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), as well as meeting with both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning Committee Members to ascertain the training requirements and how the training should be delivered, for example, externally, internally, virtually, face to face or a mixture.
- 4.10 Councillor briefings are held regularly but are not currently programmed within the calendar of meetings. The briefings are added ad-hoc, often at short notice. The briefings are well received and provide an opportunity for Officers to brief Members on recent developments, to provide training and to facilitate the joint working between Councillors and Officers. It is considered that regular monthly Councillor briefings that are scheduled and added to Councillor’s calendars will not only encourage attendance but also provide Member’s with an opportunity to request topics to be added to the sessions. These briefings will be added to and form part of the proposed Member development programme.
- 4.11 In addition to Member briefings, consideration could also be given to other Member development opportunities. This includes:
- a Member Development Conference with a variety of topics and both internal and external speakers. Such an event could be held annually or bi-annually with Members being encouraged to propose topics for inclusion in the agenda;
  - how the Member’s bulletin could be utilised to promote development opportunities, to showcase effective Member development or as a development tool itself; and
  - a protocol for promoting and determining applications for attendance at paid for events.
- 4.11 Personal development is important for Councillors and the Committee is asked to consider the mechanisms for identifying training needs. A programme of member development should be directed towards identified need and the proposal is that officers should undertake some form of Personal Development Review with Councillors to ascertain training need. As it is not possible to conduct individual meetings with all 93 Councillors some form of collective Personal Development Review is required. Some potential examples to explore include:
- a survey with all Councillors;
  - engagement with Group Business Managers;
  - 121 meetings with nominated Councillors to discuss their individual training needs; or
  - meetings with individual committees to collectively discuss training requirements.
- 4.12 As reported to the meeting of the Committee held on 28 July 2022, there are a number of resources available for Councillors within the e-learning system “iLearn”:
- Councillor Induction and Councillor development section containing slides and recordings of the sessions from the Councillor Induction events held in May 2021
  - An e-learning section which contains the following:
    - Cyber Security
    - Community Leadership
  - Access to the Learning and Development MS365 e-learning page which contains
    - Hints and tips on using MicroSoft365
    - Application-focussed quick-start guides and videos
  - My Development Toolkit

- Search any topic and find videos and articles to enhance your own development journey.

4.13 Resources available within ILearn have been promoted to Councillors via the Councillor Bulletin and a further promotion to Councillors of these resources could take place early in 2023.

## **5 Issues and Choices**

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5.1 The Committee is asked to consider the proposal for a structured four-year Councillor Development programme starting with 2023 - 2025 (year 3 - 4) and provide comment on the proposed consultative method of preparing this programme.

## **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 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 As detailed in paragraph 4.8 it is proposed to consult Councillors of both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning Committees on the content of the training for these Committees. Wider consultation of all Members may occur following consideration of this report by Committee.

## **7.4 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.4.1 As detailed in paragraphs 4.8 and 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**

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Members' induction programme 2021/2022

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

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)