

## **OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND DEVELOP: A PROGRAMME FOR MEMBERS 2008/09**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Members are invited to give consideration to the proposals for the Member Training and Development Programme for 2008/09. The report also contains details of Member attendance at training sessions in 2007/08.

### **2 MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING SESSIONS 2007/08**

- 2.1 A summary report of Member attendance at training sessions during the period 1 May 2007 to 5 March 2008 is attached at Appendix 1. (There are still two courses to be run, on 13 and 19 March 2008 on the Corporate Manslaughter and Homicide Act 2007 and Concessionary Travel respectively.)
- 2.2 Members have been sent, under separate cover, details of attendance, and any comments as a result will be reported to the meeting.
- 2.3 The Council, on 27 June 2006, agreed that all Members of the Development Control Committee (i.e. all Councillors) should attend two planning training sessions totalling four hours in each municipal year, or make alternative training arrangements with officers if unable to attend scheduled sessions. The Standards Committee on 12 April 2007 agreed that the tour of the District, organised once a year by the Head of Planning and Transportation, should be formally recognised as qualifying towards two hours of the recommended planning training commitments of a Member. This is also reported in Appendix 1.
- 2.4 Details of Parish/Town Councils attendance are attached at Appendix 2.
- 2.5 In addition to the opportunities provided by this Council's training programme, Members were also able to take advantage of two Member Away Days on the budget and there was specific training for the Review Committee. The Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor KH Hudson, attended the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) Leadership Academy.

### **3 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT – MARCH 2008**

- 3.1 At the previous meeting of the Standards Committee, it was agreed that all Members would be sent a self-assessment questionnaire seeking feedback on the 2007/08 training programme and details of any individual training/development requirements in 2008/09, as an initial pilot in the area of tailored development for Members.
- 3.2 37 self-assessment questionnaires were circulated and 27 returned. A summary of responses is set out in Appendix 3.

### 3.3 Key findings are:-

- 23 respondents found the training sessions either useful or very useful.
- 2 respondents thought the sessions could be improved and 1 thought they were poor. The issues seem to be a lack of dynamism in presentation and the courses being too long.
- For those Members not able to attend one or more training and development sessions, work/family commitments was the most quoted reason.
- There is a clear preference for holding training courses equally between venues in Rayleigh and Rochford.
- There is a clear preference for arranging training courses in the afternoon and repeating them in the evening.

## 4 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2008/09

- 4.1 The Council's 'Key Policies and Actions 2008/09' report identifies the Member Training and Development Programme as one of the key projects for the year. We also need to implement the findings of the Peer Review and, in particular, to move to more tailored development for Members, taking into account roles/needs where possible.
- 4.2 In addition, the Council's Communications Strategy requires training to be offered in dealing with the media, and the Race Equality and Disability Equality Schemes require equalities training to be included in the induction/refresher training programme to ensure the Council continues to meet its obligations under equalities legislation.
- 4.3 In previous years the Member training and development programme has been devised to be responsive to the corporate priorities of the Council, the CPA Improvement Plan and to reflect the IDeA Member Skills Framework, and these themes will continue.
- 4.4 Provision has been made in the Council's draft meetings timetable for the new municipal year for training sessions to continue to be arranged in three segments – induction/refresher training in May/June/July, with competency training in October/November and February/March, with 20 sessions identified in total.
- 4.5 There will be circumstances where it is advantageous to both officers and Members to be trained together in joint sessions. These can lead to:-
- better use of resources where the requirements of both groups coincide, such as skills training and understanding new legislation;

- a spin off benefit to participants in understanding the constraints and requirements of Members and officers;
- in the operation of the scrutiny function, for example, better working practices and relationships between officers and Members can be achieved.

4.6 It is proposed to organise the 2008/09 Training and Development Programme into separate themes covering Induction for New Members/Refreshers for all Members; a programme for the Review Committee; training aimed at Area Committees; opportunities for Members of Probity/Regulatory Committees; and training suitable for all Members, including the Executive Board. It is also proposed to institute some work with Member Champions to assist them in their role.

4.7 The details are as follows:-

#### **Induction for New Members/Refreshers for all Members**

- Corporate priorities (to include equalities and diversity)
- Ethical framework/code of conduct
- Development Control
- Budget process/financial management

These courses will be delivered in May 2008 by Council officers as part of the overall programme.

#### **Review Committee**

4.8 In discussion with the Chairman of the Review Committee, it is proposed that the Review Committee Members need their own specific programme. This would cover:-

- Scrutinising finance
- Scrutiny and performance
- Weighing evidence
- Communications skills for scrutiny

These courses will be delivered by specialist external trainers, including RADA, on dates to suit Review Committee Members.

**Area Committees**

4.9 Training of specific relevance to Area Committee Members is proposed as follows:-

- Chairmanship of public meetings
- Public speaking
- Dealing with difficult situations
- County Highways
- Anti-social behaviour – including the role of the Crown Prosecution Service
- Community leadership

These courses will be delivered by a combination of Council officers and external specialists at slots within the overall training programme as they are of interest to all Members.

**Probity/Regulatory Committees**

4.10 Training of specific relevance to Members of Probity and Regulatory Committees is proposed as follows:-

- Licensing and Gambling Acts
- Member decision-making structures and processes (including the scrutiny process)

These sessions will be delivered by a combination of Council officers and external specialists at slots within the overall training programme as they are of interest to all Members.

**Training suitable for all Members, including the Executive Board**

4.11 Development opportunities of general relevance for all Members interested in the development of policy are proposed as follows:-

- Local Development Framework
- Affordable Housing and Planning
- Local Area Agreements
- Risk Management
- Media Awareness

- Questioning skills
- Partnerships

These sessions will be delivered by a combination of Council officers and external specialists at slots within the overall training programme as they are of interest to all Members.

### **Member Champions**

4.12 Feedback has been received that the Member Champions need support and guidance in their role. The Review Committee has identified this as a potential area of work for 2008/09. However, in the interim it is suggested that:

- Officers meet with the existing Champions as a group to obtain feedback on their experience.
- Lead officers work with each Member Champion to brief them on a regular basis and to advise of key seminars/events that may be relevant.
- Lead officers be briefed on the expectations of their role in working with Member Champions.
- The Member training and development budget be used as appropriate to enable Member Champions to build their knowledge and expertise.

Bath and North East Somerset Council have received funding from the Department of Local Government and Communities to investigate and develop support systems for Member Champions. As a result, the Council has produced a booklet containing guidance that makes the scope and potential of the Champion role clearer and easier to understand. A copy of the booklet is being obtained to assess its usefulness in Rochford.

### **Executive Board**

4.13 It is possible that we can access around 12 days of mentoring support as part of the National Councillor Mentoring Programme. It is proposed that this is utilised for work with the Executive Board in the 2008/09 municipal year.

### **Other Aspects**

4.14 In terms of requests for specific development for Members, there has been limited feedback. All comments received are recorded in Appendix 3. Most of the requests are covered in the training programme. It is therefore suggested that, when the Standards Committee conducts the mid-programme review in October, the issue of any specific development requests is considered again at that point.

- 4.15 The Review Committee on 11 March 2008 is considering the final report of the project team looking at planning appeal procedures. One of the potential recommendations from this review is to the Standards Committee, suggesting that training for Members on the latest changes in planning legislation take place every 4 months, to ensure that decision-making is based on the latest planning rules. An update on the actual recommendation from the Review Committee will be provided at the meeting. The 2008/09 Member Training and Development Programme is already full and includes sessions on Development Control, the Local Development Framework and Affordable Housing and Planning, as well as the tour of the District. It is suggested that officers use these sessions where possible to ensure Members are kept up to date on legislation. Alternatively, briefings could be provided immediately prior to Development Control Committee meetings, as well as providing written guidance.
- 4.16 It is proposed to pilot the use of different types of learning material. Calderdale Council has won awards for its Member development activities. These include production of a DVD on charring meetings and also a 3-DVD set with booklets on getting the most out of scrutiny. These are being obtained and will be trialled with Committee Chairmen and the Review Committee as appropriate.
- 4.17 We are also in the process of establishing online accounts for Members to access the new 'modern councillor' e-learning service, which provides short, interactive e-learning modules on topics such as working with the media and community leadership.
- 4.18 In accordance with the results of the Member survey it is proposed that we continue to arrange courses in the afternoon and then repeat them in the evening. However, there may be occasions when these timings need to be reviewed in order to accommodate training that may need a larger session. Additionally, the costs of using an external trainer can be high if the actual attendance is quite low.
- 4.19 It is also proposed to continue to arrange training equally between the Civic Suite, Rayleigh and appropriate venues in the Rochford area of the District.
- 4.20 Taking into account the views from the questionnaire about the length of training courses, we will aim for each course to last a maximum of two hours, plus a 15 minute refreshment break part way through.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The cost of Member training is met from the Member training budget, which is set at £20,000 for 2008/09.

## **6 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 It is proposed to continue to offer Parish/Town Councils places on relevant courses. The recommendation from the Review Committee is that

Parish/Town Councils should be offered more than one place on a course. In fact, where a Parish/Town Council has requested additional places, this has always been accommodated to date. It is suggested that in future we offer courses to Parish/Town councils without specifying a number of places, and then, dependent on requests, allocate places or run an additional course if necessary. If it is necessary to run a specific course to accommodate Parish/Town Council demand, we may need to seek a funding contribution from the Parish/Town Councils concerned.

## **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) To consider the summary of Members' attendance at training sessions during the municipal year 2007/08 as set out in paragraph 2.1 to 2.5.
- (2) To agree the proposals for the Member Training & Development Programme for 2008/09 as set out in paragraph 4.1 to 4.20.

Sarah Fowler

Head of Information and Customer Services

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### **Background Papers:-**

None

For further information please contact Sarah Fowler on:-

Tel:- 01702 318135

E-Mail:- sarah.fowler@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.