

**19 November 2015**

**ITEM: 7**

## **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **Members Training and Development**

**Wards and communities affected:**

N/A

**Key Decision:**

N/A

**Report of:** Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal Services

**Accountable Head of Service:** Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal Services

**Accountable Director:** Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive

**This report is public**

#### **Executive Summary**

This report sets out the current Members Training and Development programme which is offered to all Elected Members in order to assist them in their work.

In addition to the Training and Development programme, Members Induction sessions are offered to all new Elected Members to provide a welcome and introduction to the organisation.

Members are requested to review the current arrangements on offer and suggest any areas for future improvement.

#### **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 That the Committee comment upon the quality and breadth of the current Members Training and Development Programme.**
- 1.2 That officers be instructed to identify innovative ways to enhance the Member Development and Training Programme in Thurrock, such as through the development of a regional Member Development Programme and an Online Training Portal.**
- 1.3 That each Political Group nominate a “Training Advocate” to act as a lead liaison between Elected Members and Democratic Services in order to help identify which skills Members wish to develop and promote the training courses on offer.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

### **History of Member Training**

- 2.1 The Council used to employ an officer within the organisational development team who managed member training. This officer established a Member working group to steer Member training each year. This was chaired by the then Portfolio Holder for Central Services.
- 2.2 Following organisational change the responsibility for Member training was transferred to Legal Services. In recent years the programme was managed by the Member Services Office Manager but following her redundancy in March 2015 this role has reversed back to the Principal Democratic Services Officer.

### **How is Training Identified?**

- 2.3 Member training is informed in two ways, via service officers and Members. At the end of each municipal year officers and Members are contacted by Member Services to check which training courses are still current and, in the case of Members, to ask for any suggestions on new courses or further development.
- 2.4 The training programme has a core set of statutory training courses that must be attended by Members undertaking certain duties. These include aspects of Planning and Licensing Committees, as well as introduction to the basic legal and constitutional expectations in being an elected Member. All statutory courses are set out in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.5 In addition to statutory courses the Council offers optional courses that cover a range of topics from 'overview and scrutiny' to 'Health System Training'. These optional courses are identified by the directorates as useful to add on to the programme.
- 2.6 There is a small budget available (£5,800) for personal Member development and each Member is able to apply to attend external courses paid for by the Council. In the past Members have attended specialist crime conferences and public speaking workshops as part of this scheme. Members must demonstrate how the training helps in their role as an elected member and the Head of Legal Services is given final say on the cost expenditure. In general, other political parties are also contacted if a Member seeks to attend a particular training event as a portfolio holder to recognise the role of shadow and opposition portfolio holders.

### **How is Training Delivered?**

- 2.7 The methods and content of training sessions is devolved to the departments responsible as they have the expertise to provide the best training. It is then up to those departments whether they employ an external trainer or provide

in-house training. This decision is usually based on the resources available to that department but also the specialist skills and knowledge needed to provide the training.

- 2.8 There is no central member training budget beyond that referred to in 2.6 and departments are expected to resource the training through their existing budgets.

### **Corporate Induction Session**

- 2.9 Following an election, all new Elected Members are invited and encouraged to attend a Corporate Induction session which is offered as a welcome and an introduction to the organisation. An overview of the session provided in 2015 is attached at **Appendix 1**.

- 2.10 The purpose and aims of the Corporate Induction are:

- for new Councillors to familiarise themselves with their new role and how Thurrock Council works
- to introduce new Councillors to the people who they need to know to do their job effectively (e.g. Directors and the Senior Management team, the Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services),
- to show you how and where to access the information you need.
- to run through the legal framework Councillors will be operating within.

- 2.11 It is appreciated that this is a busy time for newly Elected Councillors, where there is much information to digest and paperwork to complete, so the sessions are designed to cover the essentials and introduce Councillors to the Senior Management team so that they can become familiar with the overall structure, responsibilities and roles within the Council in addition to fundamentals of decision making and Constitutional matters.

- 2.12 Members have reported that a useful feature of the Corporate Induction is the “if knew then what I know now” session presented by more experienced Councillors, where new Members can find out more about the role of being a Councillor and can ask questions in an open environment.

- 2.13 By all means the Corporate Induction session is not designed to be exhaustive at this early stage, where historically we have found that it is beneficial to present information in bit size chunks in order for Members to digest at their own pace, following which all Councillors have the opportunity to attend any of the training sessions offered as part of the more extensive Members Training and Development Programme.

- 2.14 In addition to the Corporate Induction, Members are encouraged to learn from one another, and in the past Groups have arranged for the operation of a “buddy” system where a new Councillor is paired with a more experienced Member to learn from the experiences from others and also on the “basics”,

such as how to use the microphone equipment in the Council Chamber, how to structure questions and motions and familiarise themselves with the Group rooms.

- 2.15 Members Services also provide training and advice to Members and offer one-to-one support on a range of matters, for example, Members using their iPads, blogs, register of interests.
- 2.16 Democratic Services regularly provide advice to Members on the process to submit Members questions for Council and Cabinet, how to word a motion, the Call-In procedure and creating and submitting petitions. These are all important features of being a Ward Councillor and Members report that they find this one-to-one advice beneficial.

### **Members Training and Development Programme**

- 2.17 Thurrock provides a wider range of training for Councillors through the Members Training and Development Programme, this intends to build Councillors knowledge in particular areas – such as planning, licensing or children’s social care – and develop their skills – for example in effective scrutiny, improving ICT skills or how to use Twitter and Blogging.
- 2.18 Every municipal year a member training programme is offered to all Members that is a mixture of statutory and optional training courses. This is administered by the Member Services Team with the responsibility for content and delivery resting with the specialist departments. The Programme for 2015/16 is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.19 Training sessions but all are open to all 49 Elected Members and are spread out across the municipal year depending on service need, for example Planning and Licensing training courses are offered earlier on in the calendar to ensure that Members received sufficient training to enable them to sit on the relevant Committee.
- 2.20 An example of the guidance and advice offered to Members during the mandatory Planning training sessions is attached at **Appendix 3** for Members information. This information is comprehensive and delivered in a workshop environment where Members are able to ask questions. Subsequent sessions on decision making have also been delivered and further sessions on design and enforcement are planned for later on in the year.

### **Additional Sources of Support**

- 2.21 The Local Government Association provides a range of advice and support for Elected Members, an online resource is available which is designed as a quick reference guide to provide Members with the essential information that they need to know as a Councillor. This resource can be found here:  
<http://www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-2015/16>

2.22 There are many useful publications and briefing guides on the portal which include:

- a) Councillors Guide – A Guide for New Councillors 2015/16  
[http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/L15-125+The+Councillors'+20Guide+2015-16\\_03.pdf/5b4d2760-0ac3-4cfe-b870-1768987c482d](http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/L15-125+The+Councillors'+20Guide+2015-16_03.pdf/5b4d2760-0ac3-4cfe-b870-1768987c482d)

### 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

#### Challenges

3.1 There are a number of challenges that Member training has faced historically:

1. **Member engagement:** Through numerous surveys and discussions with Members over many years there is still a view that training is poorly attended and Member engagement in steering and developing training is low. Members have cited that evening sessions add to the already busy committee timetable and that the programmes are not engaging enough. Afternoon sessions to mirror evening sessions have been provided in the past and although effort was made to include more appealing and unusual courses, this proved difficult with little central budget. There has been a move to place some fundamental training material online for Members to access in their own time. This was instigated following a Member survey in 2011.

In the last two municipal years the attendance at optional training courses has increased and this puts into question whether member engagement is still an issue.

2. **Engagement of Longer Serving Members:** There is a notable culture in Thurrock that the member training is seen as a service for new Members only and long serving Members need not attend. There is a good argument to encourage long serving Members to renew their skills in certain areas and keep updated with current best practice. There may also be a need to look at more relevant training for Members with more experience.
3. **Budget:** There is no central Member training budget and therefore it is difficult to provide additional courses that sit outside departments that Members may benefit from.

#### Aspirations for the Future

3.2 The current Members Training Programme meets Thurrock needs to offer training advice for those members serving on Committees such as Planning, Licensing and Corporate Parenting – for which training is mandatory. Although training and support is also available for a range of other areas –

from finance and scrutiny to twitter, blogging and media training – it is acknowledged that some Councillors may wish to undertake further training in specialist areas, for example, effective chairmanship, effective community leadership.

- 3.3 As a result two possible areas where the Members Training Programme could be enhanced have been identified:

The development of a regional 'Member Development Programme'

- 3.4 In order to offer a wider breadth of varied and exciting training courses for Elected Members, Thurrock could investigate the possibility of developing a regional Member Development Training Programme. In doing so Thurrock could look to host courses and charge external delegates from other local authorities, thereby recouping some or all of the cost of providing the training.
- 3.5 The benefit of this would be that all Thurrock Members would have an opportunity to attend further training courses which otherwise would be unfeasible due to the cost implications for the authority.
- 3.6 A sample of the training courses available through our regional provider (the East of England Local Government Association) is attached at **Appendix 4**, although courses can be tailored to individual authorities or bespoke courses created.
- 3.7 The indicative cost of training is generally charged at £625 + VAT per day, but the cost can vary depending on the trainer, course and supporting requirements. Thurrock has a very small budget for Member training and if this route was considered officers would need to examine the viability of selling course spaces to external delegates in order to offset the cost for Thurrock Councillors. This would carry some risk, as if the income target was not reached the cost would need to be borne from Thurrock's budget.

The development of an Online Training Portal

- 3.8 It is acknowledged that it can be difficult for some Members to attend training courses due to work commitments and some would prefer to learn at their own pace through an online 'e-learning' training portal which can be accessed at a convenient time to suit them.
- 3.9 Although Thurrock has a 'Councillor Zone' on the intranet with a range of briefing notes and presentations which may be useful, this could be significantly improved.
- 3.10 If an online training portal was developed for Members a range of more comprehensive information could be uploaded and accessible at any time. Officers could further look to develop this by creating 'how to' videos which some Members may find effective.

## Other Training Opportunities

- 3.11 In the past some Members have expressed an interest in attending other training opportunities provided by a range of associations, such as the LGiU (think tank and local authority membership organisation).  
<http://www.lgiu.org.uk/events/page/2/>

Due to the limited training budget available each request is considered on a case-by-case basis by the Head of Legal Services to determine the value of a Member attending the training.

## **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Members are requested to review the current Corporate Induction and Members Training Programme and comment upon the packages in place, identifying any learning opportunities.
- 4.2 In order to improve the Members Development Programme the Committee are asked to agree that each Political Group nominate a "Training Advocate" to act as a lead liaison with their group members in order to help determine which training opportunities Members would find most beneficial. If a response was particularly high for a certain course Democratic and Members Services could then investigate further.
- 4.3 The Training Advocate could also promote courses to other Elected Members at group level to encourage attendance, or feedback any further ideas for consideration and improvement. This could help overcome the challenges identified in 3.1.

## **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 Not applicable.

## **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 At the most fundamental level, Member training allows Members to engage in quasi-judicial and executive decision making in accordance with the law, constitution and best practice. Beyond this, training allows Members to develop and learn more about their role and become better community representatives.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**  
**Financial Accountant**

This report acknowledges that there is a small budget available for Members training and development (£5,800). If a regional Member Development Programme was developed this would incur additional costs to the authority (approximately £625 + VAT per training day), however this cost could be mitigated if external delegates were charged or if Thurrock worked in partnership with other nearby local authorities. There would be some risk to the authority if enough delegates could not be secured on the session in order to offset the cost. If an online training portal could be developed in-house it is anticipated any costs would be negligible as improvements could be made utilising existing resources.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**  
**Deputy Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer**

There are no legal implications arising from this report beyond the fact that the recommendations will contribute towards good and informed governance.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development and Equalities Manager**

There are no direct diversity and equality implications arising from this report, beyond the fact that the recommendations promote the equality of opportunity for all, giving every Member the chance to fulfil their potential.

### **7.4 Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable.

## **8. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None.



## **9. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: 2015 Corporate Induction Session Overview
- Appendix 2: 2015/16 Members Training and Development Programme
- Appendix 3: Planning Training Presentation
- Appendix 4: Sample Member Training Courses, East of England Local Government Association

### **Report Author:**

Stephanie Cox

Senior Democratic Services Officer

Legal and Democratic Services