



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Members' Education and Training

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group Report

March 2022

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Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Tom Wallis (Chairman)

Councillor Mike Bishop

Councillor Matt Hodgson

Councillor David Hughes

Councillor Perran Moon

Councillor Les Sibley

Councillor Doug Webb (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Sandy Dallimore

Councillor Simon Holland

Councillor Ian Middleton

Councillor Adam Nell

Councillor Bryn Williams

Membership of the Working Group

Councillor Patrick Clarke

Councillor Matt Hodgson

Councillor Dorothy Walker

Councillor Sandy Dallimore

Councillor Adam Nell

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Education and Training Working Group was established in September 2021, to review and evaluate the induction programme and general training offered to Members following the May 2021 elections.

The working group met on four occasions and have made nine recommendations regarding future induction programmes and ongoing training.

The working group believe that approval and subsequent implementation of the recommendations will help newly elected Members quickly get to grips with the workings of the council as an organisation and specifically their role as an elected representative, whilst also building a general knowledge bank of information and resources for returning and longer serving Members.

The recommendations of the group are:

1. That the Member Education and Training Working Group (“the working group”) be a standing working group that reviews induction/training on an ongoing basis. The group will be formed of existing and newly elected members, with newly elected members automatically receiving an invite to join the group. Maximum membership of the group to be capped at 7, reviewed annually with existing Members (e.g. 2021 new Members) to have the option to continue with the group or stand down.
2. The current working group to continue to operate to support the ongoing Member training programme.
3. A library of FAQ/crib sheet/information documents be produced by relevant officers, in consultation with the working group, as a brief introduction and overview to the key aspects of being an elected Member, including but not limited to:
 - Attending a full Council meeting
 - IT matters, including the mod.gov app
 - Dealing with residents
 - Dealing with officers
 - Departments available to shadow
 - Dealing with planning queries
 - Dealing with frequent resident queries i.e. hedge/footpath/pothole queries
 - Dealing with more complicated resident issues i.e. highways
 - Safeguarding
4. A library of short guidance documents to be produced by relevant officers, in consultation with the working group, covering topics including but not limited to:
 - Dealing with fellow elected Members
 - Working with town and parish councils

- The role of a Committee member
 - The role of the Committee Chair(man)
 - The role of an Executive Member
 - The role of the Chair(man) of the Council
 - The role of the Leader of the Council
 - The role of the council's statutory officers: S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and Head of Paid Service
5. Where practicable, the trialling of short committee specific training sessions held immediately before/after scheduled Committee meetings, similar to the training programme in place for Planning Committee. Sessions to be 15/20 minutes in length and based on one of three areas:
- Relevant – linked to an item on the agenda
 - Reminder – a refresh of information previously provided
 - Requested – by Members in advance of considering a particular item
6. Production of information for each service/department, including details of the areas covered by the service/department, the preferred method of contact, structure and managers/teams.
7. Development and promotion of the Members' portal.
8. Delegation to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the working group, to agree an induction and training programme for the May – July 2022 period following the May 2022 elections.
9. Delegation to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the working group, to agree the welcome pack for councillors elected at the May 2022 elections.

The working group suggests that each political group give consideration to the information and guidance provided to their respective election candidates, to help them prepare for the role of an elected Member. The working group acknowledge that they and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have no remit over the working of individual political groups, and the decision of whether or not this suggestion is taken up would be down to each individual group.

Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Chairman of Education and Training Working Group

Introduction

At the September 2021 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Sandy Dallimore proposed that a working group be established to review education and training for Members, to gather views and feedback on the induction process and ongoing member training, to identify any areas of development or improvement.

The Committee supported the suggested topic and agreed to establish a working group, with a scoping document (Appendix 1) being considered and agreed by the Committee in October 2021.

Objectives and context of the review

The induction programme for newly elected Members has expanded since 2018, and in May 2021 was combined with the County Council induction programme due to both authorities holding elections in the same year, as a one off as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Member training has recently been given a better focus, with Members receiving several quality training sessions at the beginning of the 2021/22 municipal year.

Reviewing the training and looking at improvements and focus is on benefit to all, as is looking at the ongoing needs of member training. Looking at and understanding the knowledge needs of Members is key to the future deliverable training and council operations.

There is an obvious need for Members to understand their role and scope within the organisation and the wider community. This leads to a better and more efficient working environment, and Members are able to fulfil all aspects of their role.

Conclusion

The recommendations of this review are aimed at improving the annual induction and ongoing training available for Members, and giving an understanding of the information and knowledge needed by all Members to allow them to fulfil their role effectively and efficiently.

The working group acknowledge that each Member will have different reasons for standing for election and the amount of time they can commit to carrying out the role. The recommendations relating to guidance documents are designed to cover the basics of the role of member, to act as an initial knowledge base to be built on during the term(s) of office served.

The working group have also made a suggestion relating to the role of the political groups in preparing their candidates for a possible role as an elected Member. All members of the working group are from different political groups and have different experiences regarding their selection and subsequent election, but all agreed that it would be useful for each group to consider the information they give to their candidates during the election process, and ongoing support to those who are elected.