

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	Effective Member Development	
Report No:	OAS/FH/17/019	
Report to and date:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	20 July 2017
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Purpose of report:	This report builds upon recent discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding member development, seeking member input into how the member development programme can be developed to ensure it most effectively helps members to deliver their role.	
Recommendation:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee: It is requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees assess the report, making any recommendations for improvement to the programme to be considered by the Member Development Steering Group	

Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>		<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Consultation:		This report incorporates the outcomes of the member development survey, which was sent to all members of the Council	
Implications:			
<i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
If members do not receive sufficient and adequate training, they may be ineffective in discharging their role or make inappropriate decisions	Low	The member development programme seeks to provide a robust package of training for members	Low
Ward(s) affected:		N/A	
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>		None	
Documents attached:		Appendix A: Member Development Survey Outcomes Appendix B: Member Development Programme Events and Attendance	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2017, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, which identified the concern that attendance at member development sessions was low (each session attracting 14 attendees on average) and there were 18 members who had not attended a training session in the past year. The list of previous events and attendance numbers is included at **Appendix B**.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny discussion was raised at the subsequent meeting of the Member Development Group, a joint working group between the two Councils. The Member Development Group held similar concerns regarding attendance, which had led to the commissioning of a member development survey to assess member development needs. The Member Development Group was minded that it would be helpful if the Overview and Scrutiny Committees could assess current attendance levels, and whether recommendations could be made to increase attendance.
- 1.3 In March, the Member Development Group agreed to move away from the Member Development Charter Approach, to enable a more flexible and responsive approach to development, that is tailored to our members needs.
- 1.4 This paper aims to serve as the basis for Councillors on which to discuss the current strengths and weaknesses of the development plan, and assess how the offer can be developed to maximise the use of training resources and best meet Councillor needs.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 Officers recognise that there may be many good reasons why members do not attend training sessions. There can be other commitments, illness, or the session offers limited benefit to the individual members (for example, a session on procurement of services particularly attracts members of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) committees)
- 2.2 The demands placed on Councillors rarely decreases. Councillors have to manage their communications, ensuring they respond to e-mails and read committee reports and agendas. They need to keep on top of their community caseload and work to support their residents. The Councils' adopted Families and Communities Strategy emphasises the need for the Councillor to act as a Community Leader. Whilst these demands can make it difficult to fit in time for training, they also highlight the diverse range of skills and capabilities that are required to be a Councillor, increasing the potential need for training. It is the responsibility of each member to ensure they have the requisite knowledge and skills to fulfil their role.
- 2.3 At present, training and development is offered through the following means:
 - A comprehensive induction programme for new Councillors;
 - Monthly evening training sessions, alternating between West Suffolk House and the Mildenhall Office at College Heath Road;

- Members can request attendance at specific outside training events where there is a defined need / requirement linked to their role;
- Members have a specific section on the Council's intranet, which includes briefings on key issues, as well as weekly policy alerts on national developments and members' news on internal matters.

2.4 Current training events scheduled and in development include:

- Safeguarding, to ensure members are informed of the requirements placed upon the Council in this important area – scheduled for 13 July;
- Chairing Skills – in response to member request, a targeted session has been created to ensure relevant members are confident and ensure they can obtain the most from their meetings – scheduled for 4 July;
- Licensing appeals – to ensure Committee members receive their mandatory training – scheduled for 9 August;
- Energy – a knowledge based session to learn more about energy investments and developments – dates to be confirmed.

2.5 In addition to the above, the member development survey highlighted that members are also be interested in e-learning. The Local Government Association's national e-learning modules have been adapted for West Suffolk and are currently being trialled by officers and members (in conjunction with the Member Development Group).

2.6 The outcomes of the member development survey have been included for reference at **Appendix A**. In general, these highlight that:

- Members generally feel confident in delivering their role, and feel they have the skills and knowledge necessary to do so;
- There are a small number of areas where members feel additional training would be of benefit;
- Results regarding the nature of training to be provided were inconclusive; members generally feel that small group sessions are best.

2.7 Interestingly, the recent changes to the terms of reference of the Licensing Committees, agreed by both Councils, requires that in future members will have to undertake training in order to sit on the committees. In practice, this cannot be formally enforced on the Committee but it demonstrates a strong commitment on the part of the Council and its members. No other Committees place this requirement on members.

2.8 Timing of training will necessarily be problematic. Members have a variety of different commitments, and it is not possible to hold training sessions at a date and time that suits all.

3. How can we develop our offer?

- 3.1 In order to really consider this issue, we need to assess what we would want from member training. We need to ensure that members feel the training offer is relevant to them; when they attend events, members feel that they have learnt something, and it is worthwhile for them to attend. Members can then put that training into practice, whether through being more skilled in considering complex matters in committee, or feel more able and confident to discharge their community role.
- 3.2 In order to deliver this outcome, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees may wish to consider the following:
- Is the current approach – of set, programmed evenings, the most effective to maximise attendance?
 - Are the events sufficiently engaging for members? Could different styles be employed?
 - Are the right events being programmed to encourage attendance?
 - Are the events promoted in the right ways?
 - What makes members of the Committee most likely attend an event?
- 3.3 At **Appendix B**, officers have summarised the evaluation of member training events over the past year. In general, this shows that members have been pleased with the events provided and thought they were worthwhile.
- 3.4 If we consider that a good programme of development is the “carrot” for members to attend, then Overview and Scrutiny Committees may also want to assess whether there is need for greater enforcement – the “stick” approach. This could include:
- Stronger use of the political group system, for example sending periodic records of training to group leaders;
 - Publicising member attendance at training, in the same way that attendance at committees is also publicised;
 - Increasing the number of committees for which training is mandatory; this could include development control, PASC, Standards and Growth Steering Group as examples. In most cases, it is expected that members on these committees have sufficient experience or training.
 - Increasing the number of knowledge sessions considered mandatory – for example data protection, prevent, safeguarding – with associated “naming and shaming” of those who had failed to attend / undertake e-learning
- 3.5 Officers have identified practices employed by other councils, in addition to the potential ideas above. Most ideas have already been tried or considered within both Councils, but not continued with. These have included:

- Knowledge development sessions following before / after / in place of regular committee meetings focussed on specific groups of members (this has previously been discounted)
- Member performance self-evaluation with individual development plans formed (this can be a time-consuming process)
- Compulsory e-learning modules
- Greater emphasis on competency based development – community engagement and leadership, public speaking, thinking differently, influencing skills.