

Report to Constitution and Members' Services Standing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 4 March 2008



Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Member Training Programme 2008/09

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Recommendations:

- (1) To consider the comments made by Councillors on the member training programme;**
- (2) To consider arrangements for Member Induction in May 2008;**
- (3) To consider the following:**
 - (a) courses to be discontinued;**
 - (b) inclusion of additional courses on:**
 - Section 106 Agreements**
 - Forward Planning issues**
 - (c) skills training arrangements/awareness sessions.**
- (4) To consider whether any courses should be recommended as mandatory and whether the Remuneration Panel should be asked to look at the issue of non attendance;**
- (5) To consider a policy on daytime, evening and weekend courses.**

Report:

1. This report deals with the member training programme for 2008/09. The following documents are enclosed:

- ... (a) the summary programme for 2007/08 (Appendix 1);
- ... (b) course attendances during 2007/08 (Appendix 2);
- ... (c) consultation submissions by Councillors (Appendix 3); and
- ... (d) note of Overview and Scrutiny Committee decisions on training (Appendix 4).

Overview of Member Responses

2. Valuable Courses

(a) M2 (Code of Conduct), M3 (Introduction to Planning), M4 (Planning Protocol), M9 (Housing Appeals Panel)*, M10 (Finance etc)*, M11 (Licensing Panel)* (Councillor P Smith).

*Panel Members only;

(b) Personal skills sessions, awareness sessions* (particularly those recurrent issues or a service) (Councillor Jon Whitehouse).

*Awareness sessions should be held less frequently than annually;

(c) M8 (Climate Change), M15 (Emergency Planning) and M17 (Chairmanship) may be of interest to LSP (and steering groups) (Councillor P Smith).

3. Courses which might be discontinued

(a) Any session not available to Parish and Town Councillors or officers (Councillor P Smith).

4. When to hold courses?

(a) Half day sessions preferable to a full day. Evening courses acceptable but less likely to attend weekend courses (Councillor P Smith);

(b) Daytime appropriate for retired Councillors but almost impossible for those in full time work. Evening courses are acceptable provided clashes with other meetings are avoided. No objection to occasional weekend sessions (Councillor K Angold-Stephens);

(c) Unable to attend normally due to work commitments. Evening sessions should start at 7.30pm at the earliest and end at 10.00pm. Weekend sessions underused and could attend if these were held more frequently (Councillor M Cohen);

(d) Daytime courses need to be outstanding to justify time off work. Often not enough detail in advance to judge. Evening courses are preferred option if do not start too early. Weekend sessions - morning only preferred. (Councillor Jon Whitehouse).

5. Other Comments

(a) Non attendance at mandatory courses could be reflected in remuneration scheme (Councillor P Smith);

(b) New course suggestion - Partnership Working (Improvement) (Councillor P Smith);

(c) Election period needs to be taken into account in planning the training programme (Councillor K Angold-Stephens);

(d) Explore Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as accreditation for courses to ensure greater attendance from professional members (Councillor M Cohen);

(e) New course suggestion - Telecoms and Section 106 Agreements.

6. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Proposals

- (a) New course - How Matters are Considered by Committees (Councillor A Cooper);
- (b) New course - Supply of Information to Councillors (Councillor A Cooper);
- (c) Local/National Planning and Current/Related Issues (Councillor A Cooper).

7. Officer Commentary

7.1 Planning

It is suggested that the three planning courses be retained in the programme. The Director of Planning and Economic Development plans a programme comprising:

- (a) Introduction;
- (b) Planning Appeals/Other Current Issues
- (c) Forward Planning (June 2008) – Local Development Framework, East of England Plan Implications.

A separate course is planned on Section 106 Agreements (possibly daytime course). A course on Telecoms is likely to be held during 2007/8.

7.2 Finance

The Panel should consider whether a further course on the budget and local government finance should be held. In recent years, the Council has used a trainer from CIPFA which has been well received but is expensive. The existence of an ongoing training programme on finance and budgets is a KLOE under the use of resources assessment.

7.3 Information Technology (ICT)

It is proposed to repeat the introductory ICT course for members and the "Platinum" training on the COMS system in May 2008.

7.4 Service Awareness Sessions

In the 2007/8 programme, two service awareness sessions were proposed. One of these (on Environmental Services) was cancelled through lack of support and because major changes were being undertaken in this service area as a result of the Top Management Restructuring. This session could be included in the 2008/9 programme as "Cleaner, Safer, Greener" initiative.

A session on Emergency Planning was also held. It was a popular course and involved Parish and Town Councils and partner agencies. It has been suggested that a similar course could be held to deal specifically with rest and reception centres. If appropriate, a short awareness session on Emergency Planning could be held earlier in the year for new members. This might form part of the induction arrangements.

In addition, the Panel should bear in mind the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that a course on "where to find information" should be held. This would be suitable for providing service information but at a less detailed level.

7.5 Induction

... A copy of the 2007/8 induction seminar is enclosed (Appendix 5). The Panel should review their preferred arrangements. The course was somewhat "compressed" last year. Is there advantage in extending the length of the course to incorporate sessions such as emergency planning referred to in 7.4?

7.6 Personal Skills/Awareness Courses

The Panel may wish to review the following courses from 2007/8 and express views on whether they should continue:

- (a) Climate Change (M7)
- (b) Safeguarding Children (M13)
- (c) Dealing with Difficult People etc (M16)
- (d) Chairmanship (M17)*
- (e) Equalities and Diversity (M18)
- (f) Effective Reading (M20)*
- (g) Public Speaking (M21)*
- (h) Cabinet Awareness (M6)
- (i) Media Skills (M14)**/Advanced Media Skills (M27)**

*These courses have been provided in recent years by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA). In discussion with those trainers, it is apparent that these sessions could be provided in a different format, namely one whole day session in the three modules which would allow members to opt in without staying for the whole day. The course would not be of the same depth but could allow more detailed courses to be held when demand was sufficient. There could also be cost advantages.

**Course M14 has been held for several years and is designed to enhance the skills of members involved in radio interviews. M27 has been mooted this year and involves TV/Webcasting skills. M14 has always been well received and the Panel is asked whether both should be pursued. These courses are expensive and there would need to be careful review of budget allocations for the overall programme.

7.7 Overview and Scrutiny – Review

One informal review session was held during 2007/8. It was poorly attended but produced some proposals. Does the Panel wish to programme a further session in 2008/9?

7.8 Remaining Courses

It is suggested that M2 (Code of Conduct), M4 (Planning Protocol), M9 (Housing Appeals), M22 (Staff Appeals) and M23 (Complaints) should be retained.

7.9 Mandatory Courses

Does the Panel wish to recommend those courses which should be regarded as mandatory either for all councillors or categories? Should the Remuneration Panel be asked to look at the question of non attendance in such cases?

Possible mandatory courses could be:

Subject	Mandatory for
• All planning courses	All members of Council who serve on Area Plans Sub Committees
• Code of Conduct	All members
• Planning Protocol	All members
• ICT/COMS	All members
• Licensing Committee	Licensing Committee members
• Housing Appeals)	
• Staff Appeals)	Panel members
• Complaints)	

8. Budget

8.1 The final budget for 2008/9 has not been finalised at the time of writing but is expected to be around £7,500.