Report to the Constitution and Member Services Standing Scrutiny Panel

Report reference:
Date of meeting: 17 March 2011

Subject: Member Training 2011/12

Responsible Officer: I Willett   (01992 564243)

Democratic Services Officer: Mark Jenkins (01992 564607)

Recommendations:

(1)   To consider the draft programme for next year (Appendix 1).

(2)   To consider additional courses to be added/publicised in the programme from:

      (a)   e-learning (I Train);

      (b)   joint courses with officers;

      (c)   previous courses;

      (d)   member preferences from the IDEA study in 2010; and

      (e)   member comments via the bulletin.

(3)   To carry out consultation on the revised programme via the Bulletin.

1.   Introduction

1.1   This report is designed to allow members to carry out a forward review of member training for 2012/13.

1.2   Appendix 1 shows a draft programme which can be largely delivered from internal resources. These are standard courses which have formed the basis of the programme for a number of years.

1.3   The rest of the report is designed to enable the Panel to indicate other training which can be added to the programme. There is an available budget of £6,500 for 2012/13 to assist with commissioning more specialist courses with external trainers.

2.   Scope of the Training Programme

2.1   Additional training for members can be assembled from a number of different sources. These are discussed in turn below.

I Train

2.2   I Train is an on-line training initiative for individual learning by computer which has been developed by the Essex HR Partnership with a provider named Learning Pool, of which this Council is a member. This programme is still developing and current courses available are as follows:

(a)   Dealing with e-mail stress;   *
(b)   Managing priorities;   *
(c)   Health and safety introduction;
(d)   Fraud awareness;
(e)   Data protection for beginners;
(f)   Introduction to ICT;   and
(g)   GCSX Security – introduction.

2.3   Other courses scheduled to be introduced in the near future:

(a)   Outlook 2010 (new e-mail arrangements);
(b)   Managing Absence;   and
(c)   Presentation Skills.   *

2.4   Courses marked * in 2.2. and 2.3 are thought to be relevant to the role of members. However, all can be made available to members subject to home IT arrangements being satisfactory. Access to the training modules is by a straightforward internet link to the Council's website. Members would choose a screen name and a password and thereby gain access.

Officer Training Programme

2.5   The officer training programme is currently being developed for next year. In principle, it is considered where the subject matter is suitable for both members and officers, there is no reason why members should not join the sessions. Some examples of courses are set out below:

(a)   Assertiveness;
(b)   Disability awareness;
(c)   Complaints;
(d)   Finance;
(e)   Keeping cool under pressure;
(f)   Presentation skills;
(g)   Report writing;   and
(h)   Time Management.

2.6   The Panel should bear in mind that the final stage of the officer programme is influenced by the outcome of personal development reviews for staff. These are due to be completed by 31 March 2011. It is also necessary to say that if members book that they should ensure that they do attend. Availability of places on courses will be notified via the Council Bulletin from time to time through the year.

Past Courses

2.7   Examples of other courses which have found support to varying degrees in previous years are:

(a)   Awareness sessions (e.g. Emergency Planning, Environmental Services, Safer Cleaner, Greener Initiative, etc);

(b)   Dealing with Difficult People/Situations;
(c)   Planning (follow up courses on specialist topics);
(d)   Finance;
(e)   Section 106 Agreements;
(f)   Media Skills (including front of camera);
(g)   Housing Appeals;
(h)   Councillors Skills (Chairmanship, Effective Reading, Public Speaking, Questioning, Presentations);
(i)   Cabinet Awareness;
(j)   Climate Change (including local authority responses);
(k)   Equalities and Diversity;
(l)   Freedom of Information and Data Protection;
(m)   Staff Appeals;
(n)   Handling Casework; and
(o)   Complaints (service and code of conduct).

IDEA Study 2010

2.8   In early 2010, a consultant from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDEA) interviewed a number of members and produced a matrix of training preferences. These fell into three categories:

Technical Skills (Top 4)

1.	Local Government Finance	(38%)
2.	Procedure and Protocols for Council Meeting	(33%)
3.	Social Media – Pitfalls and Opportunities	(27%)
4.	Casework/LG Finance	(22%)

Interpersonal Skills (Top 4)

1.	Motivation/Team Building	(33%)
2.	Working more Effectively with Officers	(27%)
3.	Influencing and Negotiating Skills	(27%)
4.	Coaching and Mentoring	(22%)

Practical Skills (Top 4)

1.	Work/Life Balance	(33%)
2.	Time Management	(33%)
3.	Writing/Creating Effective Newsletters/Leaflets	(33%)
4.	Public Speaking	(27%)

Member Consultation

2.9   Members of the Council were consulted about training needs earlier in the year. Four responses were received and these are summarised below:

(a)   Programme Content

Cabinet awareness (but not to the exclusion of other members);
Service awareness sessions;
Council Meetings – Questions/Motions/Amendments;
Planning;
Overview and Scrutiny Skills in context of Localism;   and

Refresher Courses for longer-established Councillors in various subjects;

(b)   Timing of Courses

Evening courses preferable;
Daytime courses difficult for working members;   and
Weekend courses desirable if demand-led and a day is justified.

Other Ideas

2.10   A training company has circulated details of four modules of member training as follows:

(a)   Wardwork, Casework and Surgeries;
(b)   Member/Officer Relationships;
(c)   Partnerships in Practice;   and
(d)   A Councillor, Who? Me? (Prospective Councillors).

The cost of each session is £750 (half day) or £1,250 (full day or two in one day).

3.   Conclusions

3.1   The Panel is asked to indicate the range of courses to be added to the basic programme including:

(a)   e-based individual training;
(b)   officer courses/past courses;
(c)   the priorities expressed in the IDEA exercise; and
(d)   proposals in paragraph 2.10.

3.2   It is proposed that, following discussion, a further draft of the programme be prepared for circulation in the Bulletin.