

Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting: 11 April 2011

Report of: Constitution and Member Services SSP

Subject: Member Training 2011/12

Chairman: Councillor Mrs M McEwen

Recommendations:

- (1) To support the outline programme for next year including the following features:**
 - (a) e-learning;**
 - (b) use of joint courses with officers;**
 - (c) publication of training records on the website;**
 - (d) a clear schedule of mandatory courses;**
 - (e) other features set out in the report; and**
- (2) That a draft programme be published in the Council Bulletin for consultation purposes.**

1. Introduction

1.1 We have reviewed proposals for member training in the new Council year.

2. Scope of the Training Programme

2.1 We have examined training for members from a number of different sources which are discussed in turn below.

I Train/Modern Councillor

2.2 These are on-line training initiatives for learning by individual Councillors on computer. I Train has been developed through the Essex HR Partnership and this programme is still developing. 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 log in to the Council's website. Members would choose a screen name and a password and thereby gain access. This service is free of charge as this Council subscribes to the Essex HR Partnership.

2.5 'Modern Councillor' is a commercial package available for the Council to purchase. There are specialist modules within the product, one of which is Local Government. Modern Councillor is available for subscribers at an annual price of £1,000 (excluding VAT) for up to 100 users. It is therefore quite capable of accommodating all members of the Council. Access is similar to I Train. Examples of the local government module courses are:

- (a) Equality and diversity;
- (b) Charing meetings;
- (c) Code of conduct;
- (d) Waste management;
- (e) Your role as Councillor;
- (f) Public speaking;
- (g) Data Protection (and how it affects local government); and
- (h) Overview and Scrutiny.

2.6 We support the proposal to introduce this new form of training within the Council. We would stress however that this is individual training for Councillors at home. It may suit some Councillors but not others and we would like it to be provided alongside more traditional forms of training.

2.7 The extent to which members use this system is capable of electronic monitoring to ensure value for money.

Officer Training Programme

2.8 In previous years some suitable courses in the officer training programme have been made available to Councillors where the subject matter is suitable for both members and officers. 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.

2.9 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 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

2.10 Examples of other courses which were requested 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).

2.11 Some of these courses were cancelled through lack of support.

2.12 We are keen to see some of these courses continue. We have asked for some of the following to be pursued for next year:

- (a) Awareness session – especially emergency planning and housing;
- (b) Planning – specific topics of current interest such as Section 106 agreements;
- (c) Finance – awareness session for a non-technical audience (including General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account);
- (d) Public Speaking (including voice projection for officers and members);
- (e) Chairmanship – with particular emphasis on Overview and Scrutiny skills (including questioning);
- (f) Joint Provision of Services;
- (g) Council Meetings – Procedures/Protocols

2.13 We take it as read that mandatory courses should continue on subjects like:

- (a) code of conduct and planning protocols;
- (b) licensing, staff appeals, complaints, housing appeals and planning introduction;

2.14 If there is demand, we feel that a District tour is always helpful, particularly to new Councillors. The itinerary should reflect current issues wherever possible and have particular reference to the work of the Countrycare service.

3. Other Issues

- 3.1 We have asked that the training programme should include an induction evening for new Councillors after the May elections. In considering this we took account of work undertaken by a group of Council officers as a management development project last year. We felt that this contained a number of good ideas and we have asked these to be incorporated wherever practicable.
- 3.2 We have asked for the Saturday session held in 2010 for the first time to be repeated. This would cover the related topics of the Code of Conduct, Introduction to Planning and the Planning Protocol. We have asked the Assistant to the Chief Executive to include in the Code of Conduct not only the present rules but also the new arrangements the Government is currently developing in new legislation.

4. Member Support for Training Programme

- 4.1 We have been concerned in recent years about the degree to which all members commit themselves to training, both in new subjects and to keeping themselves up to date on courses attended previously. With this in mind, we are proposing the following measures designed to demonstrate those who regularly undertake training and those who have not:
- (a) from 2011/12 – publication on the website of training courses undertaken by all members;
 - (b) clearer listing of those courses indicated as “mandatory” focussing particularly on the regulatory functions of the Council (e.g. planning and licensing) and the personal responsibilities of Councillors (e.g. code of conduct)
- 4.2 To support this, we have asked for attendance at past training courses to be circulated to all Councillors so that:
- (a) they can check for any gaps in their training record; and
 - (b) they can assess the need for refresher training to be undertaken.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 We hope that the Committee will support the outline training programme as set out in this report and commend it to all members and encourage Group Leaders to promote it actively within their memberships.