

Standards Committee – 22nd February 2021

Elected Member Learning and Development Programme

Summary of report:

This interim report is to provide an update to Elected Members in respect of progress in the Elected Member Development Programme. This is a joint project between Legal and Democratic Services and HRD to enhance the offering to Elected Members in terms of learning and development.

Recommendation:

To note the content of the report and Appendices

1.0 Background

1.1 The Elected Member Development Programme was refreshed in 2017 and has been reviewed annually since. Normally a report is taken to Standards Committee in or around July each year to provide an update to the committee as to how much training has been undertaken by elected members in the previous year. There is an expectation in the Elected Member Code of Conduct that Elected Members will undertake 12 hours training each year. Standards Committee requested an interim report to update the committee in relation to this issue.

1.2 The current Programme attached at Appendix 1 contains an introduction setting out why learning and development for Members is important; the role of Democratic Services and the corporate Learning and Development Team; how learning opportunities will be promoted; how to book courses; and how they will be evaluated.

1.3 The programme comprises three different levels, Induction, Core Skills, and additional learning opportunities for Personal Growth.

1.4 In addition the council captures learning that elected members undertake outside of the council, for example in the normal course of their employment where it is relevant to their role as a councillor.

1.5 It has to be remembered that over the past 12 months the country has faced the challenge of dealing with Covid 19 both at a national and local level. This may have had an impact on the delivery and take up of training. It is positive to note in spite of this 11 elected members have completed 12 hours training, and that 49 members in total have undertaken some form of learning and development. Please see appendix 2.

Induction

1.6 There will be a comprehensive induction programme for all Members, whether newly elected or returning. In addition to the New Member Training facilitated by the Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, and the Chief Finance Officer, there will be the opportunity to meet with other Members and Senior Officers to learn more about corporate and constitutional processes. Each member will receive an Induction Pack setting out the support and guidance available together with other useful information about the council. Members will also be allocated a buddy/mentor from within their own group. To complement the Member Induction there will be a number of e-learning (self-paced) packages made available so that members can undertake learning at a time and in a location to suit them.

Core Skills

1.7 An annual core programme will be developed each year in consultation with Group Leaders and Elected Members. It will include the requirements of any new legislation and emerging corporate themes; ethical and governance requirements; changing standards and the impact of any scrutiny recommendations in terms of changing corporate practices. It will also include emerging themes and developments from partners. Examples of such core skills topics include: Your Role as a Corporate Parent, Protecting Information, Prevent, Safeguarding Children and Adults Awareness, Chairing Meetings, Managing the Media/Public Speaking, Social Media - dos and don'ts and Equalities

1.8 It will also include training relating to specific roles e.g.: planning committee; licensing committee; employment appeals/interview panels. Guidance will be sought from Group Leaders as to whether or not there should be more mandatory attendance on certain courses over and above planning and employment law.

Learning for Personal Growth and Development

1.9 As Members will see from the Programme at Appendix 1 there is a wide variety of additional learning modules that are available to all Members. These modules are aimed at enhancing knowledge and understanding and providing useful information about a wide range of topics which can only help members in fulfilling their roles.

Delivery of the programme

1.10 The Programme will largely be delivered by in-house subject matter experts and via e-learning/self-paced learning with potential for follow-up action learning sets. The specialist skills training such as public speaking/managing the media will require engagement of external speakers. It may also be possible to sponsor specific members on external conferences/learning events subject to relevance and budget

availability. The council also look for opportunities to work collaboratively with its neighbouring authorities and via West Midlands Council.

2.0 Resource and legal considerations:

2.1 Enhancing the training offered to Elected Members will assist the council in maintaining high standards of conduct for Elected Members as required by the Localism Act 2011. In addition to existing resources the training budget available for elected member training will need to be reviewed.

3.0 Performance and Risk Management issues:

3.1 Performance and risk management is a feature of all council functions. It is important that this system is in place to maintain public confidence in standards applied to elected members in their public office. Standards Committee will monitor and evaluate Elected Member training on an annual basis.

4.0 Equality Implications:

4.1 In maintaining up to date policies and procedures and through the provision of appropriate training the council will ensure that services are delivered fairly in an open and transparent manner. There are specific requirements in both codes that elected members and officers observe equalities.

5.0 Consultation:

5.1 Further consultation will be carried out with the Group leaders, a working group of members and group learning champions.

Author:

Tony Cox Director of Governance

☐ 01922 654822 ☐ Anthony.cox@walsall.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Current Member Training and Development Programme.

Appendix 2 –Member training in hours – anonymised