

Member Support Steering Group

13th March 2014

Report of the Assistant Director Governance and ICT

Member Training & Development Core Programme 2014-15

Summary

1. This report sets out the proposed core programme of training and development opportunities for Members for the 2014/15 municipal year.

Background

2. Members received a report on the draft core programme at the last meeting of the Steering Group which outlined that the budget available for developing Members would be significantly reduced to £5k, as from 2014/15. In preparation for this reduction budget and in effort to retain the key elements of a well balanced training programme for Members, a leaner but focussed core programme was provided in 13/14, comprising compulsory (statutory) or essential (to the Council, in achieving its ambitions) training, supplemented by a cost effective means for Members to obtain other keys skills or knowledge central to their role. In response to the latter, an optional accredited certificate in 'Local Government & Democracy' was developed, in partnership with the University of York.
3. At the last meeting of this Group, Members evaluated the relative successes of the Core Programme for 13/14 and in light of the reduced budget and the need to refocus provision accordingly, asked Officers to continue to prepare a programme for 2014/15 based on a similar format. Also at that meeting Members reflected upon and shared experiences of the new Certificate in Local Government and asked Officers to look into the possibility of continuing that provision.
4. The core programme will continue to be supplemented by ad hoc in-house additions; these usually arise when there is new information or practices that Councillors need to be made aware of. The programme is

also supplemented by regional events where these are known and available through the regional network of contacts in advance of the programme being produced every year. At the last meeting, some initial consideration was given to how any additional external activities should be funded in 2014/15, given the substantially reduced budget.

The Programme

5. At the last meeting, a skeleton of the proposed programme was presented to the Steering Group. There is still some work to be done to finalise the programme, with dates to be confirmed and officer and trainers' availability established. The provisional timings/dates set out in the programme are, therefore, subject to change.
6. The paragraphs below set out some of the now confirmed aspects of the programme and should set out enough information for the Steering Group to consider approving the proposed core programme:
 - i. Training on statutory responsibilities – training will be provided for those Members sitting on all three Planning Committees, Corporate Appeals Panel, Gambling, Licensing and Regulatory Committee and Standards Committee.

As a result of recent Planning Committee meetings, some refresher training has been identified on clarifying material planning considerations to be taken into account when making planning decisions.

- ii. Policy Sessions – these were introduced to the core programme in 2012/13 and proved popular with Members and officers. Following suggestions from Steering Group Members at the last meeting, it has been confirmed that we will be able to offer an informal discussion session on 'Projection of Pressure on Schools' in relation to an increase in housing if the draft Local Plan goes ahead and the impact this will have on school places. Confirmation has also been received that a session on 'Child Sex Exploitation' should be possible. Also, the Elections Manager has indicated he will require Members to attend some sessions on the 2015 Election and Individual Electoral Registration.

These sessions provide an opportunity for Members to receive information on forthcoming key national policy changes in an informal setting. Discussions still need to take place between officers to identify suitable topics, but it is envisaged that we will offer one or two opportunities for Members, along the lines outlined above.

iii. Pre-Council Briefings – there will be four of these throughout the year and so far there has been a good response to the request for subjects. Confirmed so far we have:

- July 2014 – York Theatre Royal refurbishment.
- October 2014 – Explore Mutual (Library and Archives)
- December 2014 – Civic History – a taster of the Local Government Course.
- March 2015 – TBC – likely to be provided by the Communities and Neighbourhoods team or Youth Council.

iv. Equalities Training and Risk Management Training– these areas have been identified as essential training for Members in 2014/15 by Officers. Certainly the equalities training is in response to the ongoing Peer Equalities Review Assessment and the Council's strive to become an 'Excellent' Authority. Currently, a Scrutiny Review is underway looking at improving the Council's approaches to democratic engagement across all communities. As a part of that work a Task Group is also looking at what training would benefit Members to assist in developing and understanding that wider engagement. The Task Group will report its recommendations before the end of the Municipal Year, at which point it would be appropriate to consider their recommendations on Member training.

v. Members Code of Conduct – The Monitoring Officer has confirmed that it would not be practical to use another local authorities Monitoring Officer to deliver training to Members as all Codes are different. Instead it is recommended that we source an external independent provider for this. Primarily aimed at the newer Councillor or as a refresher for the more experienced Councillor, this session will provide a standard refresher on the keys elements of the still comparatively new Code, including declarations of interest.

vi. Independent Training for Chairs – It has been identified that it may be beneficial to run training for Chairs in 2014/15 as this was not included in the previous programme and there has been a change of Chair for some committees. Investigation into providers of this is currently ongoing.

vii. Local Government Course

Following the successful pilot year in 2013/14, it is proposed to run the Certificate in Local Government Course again in 2014/15 in conjunction with the University of York. The University has indicated it would not be able to subsidise any places for Members or Council Staff now the pilot year has ended. The Course will still be available to both the public, Council Officers and of course, Members in 2014/15 and will run again from October 2014. The University have offered the Council flexibility over the number of places available to it for the coming academic year. The cost for Members to be met from the Member Development budget would be £180 per module per Member. For a Member undergoing the full year on the accredited course this amounts to £540 per head. If the Council asked the University to set aside 3 Member places for the new academic year, that would amount to £1,620 from the budget. Any Council Officer places would have to be met from the staff training budget.

Viii. Group Pots

For the past 2 years, a 'pot' has been allocated to each of the main Groups for expenditure on external training activities, outside of the Core Programme, provided those were supported by the relevant Group. Following on from initial discussions at the last Steering Group meeting, Members are asked to confirm, in light of the reduced available budget for overall training to Members in 2014/15, whether these pots should continue to be allocated. In 2013/14, the total allocated pot to Groups within the available budget was £5k. In 2014/15, that will be the total budget available to spend on Member training.

Although, Members discussed and supported the principle of providing these 'group pots' from within the budget at the last meeting, if some provision is being made for some independent training (Chairs, code of conduct) and for some places on the Local Government Certificate, this will leave around £2,500 from the existing budget. That provides a figure of £53 per head and gives rise to the following potential Group allocations:

Labour = £1,325

Conservative = £477

Liberal Democrat = £477

Green = £106

Independent = £106

Consultation

7. Consultation on the preparation of the Core Training Programme for Members is undertaken with this Steering Group. All Directors have been asked to identify any areas of statutory need additional to those already highlighted.

Options

8. Members can:
 - i. Approve the core programme set out in **Annex A** to this report
 - ii. Suggest revisions to the core programme at **Annex A** to this report

Analysis

9. The Council achieved Member Development Charter Status in September 2010 and the provision of a robust policy and training and development programme was developed as a result.
10. The core programme in recent years has been devised to provide a wide range of opportunities for Members. Some of these were identified through Councillor Surveys on training provision within the Council and others by senior officers, in particular those where there is new statutory or policy information to brief Members on.
11. Due to budget constraints and the Council not seeking to renew the Council's Charter status for Member Development, there has been a move away from such an intensive programme.
12. Wherever possible the cost of providing training is kept to a minimum by using in-house knowledge and expertise. This will continue to be the case going forward as budgets reduce, with notable exceptions, such as those referred to in the new proposed programme.

Council Plan 2011-2015

13. Having well informed and trained Members will continue to help the Council deliver its key priorities set out within the Council Plan 2011-15.

Implications

14. **Financial** – Any financial costs associated with the core programme 2014/15 will be met from the existing budgets available for Member Development. The majority of sessions within the programme will be provided in-house and will therefore incur little or no cost. Where there is a need to employ external trainers for specific elements of the programme as it develops, these will be costed on the basis of them being met from within the budget.
15. There are no known Human Resources, Legal, Equalities or other implications associated with delivering the proposed programme.

Risk Management

16. There is a risk that the Council may fail to respond to some of the needs of its Members, in delivering a pared down core programme largely suited to the more experienced Member. Equally so, there is a risk to resources and to reputation if the Council continues to try to provide a fuller programme not supported by the attendance levels. It is for this Steering Group to consider and balance those respective risks.

Recommendations

17. Members are asked to:
18. (i) approve the core programme for 2014/15 as set out in **Annex A** to this report, for the reasons set out in paragraphs 2 to 6;
19. (ii) consider the allocation of group pots and what sum might be appropriate, as outlined in paragraph 6 above; and
20. (iii) consider whether they wish to allocate a set number of Member places on the Local Government Certificate in the new academic year, again, as set out in paragraph 6 above.

Reason: To enable arrangements for the delivery of a core programme for the municipal year 2014/15.

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**Report
Approved**



Date 6.03.14

Specialist Implications Officer(s) None

Wards Affected: None

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A Proposed Core Programme 2014/15