	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	**AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 19 MARCH 2026.**
Subject	**MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE 2025/26**
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council Email: Andy.Graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrea McCaskie, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services Email: Andrea.McCaskie@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Ana Prelici, Senior Democratic Services Officer Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update the Committee on Member Learning and Development Activities in 2025/26 and provide feedback on the proposed Member Induction Programme for 2026/27
Annexes	Annex A- Member Learning Survey Results Anne B- Member Briefing and Training Attendance Annex C- Member Induction and Briefing Programme
Recommendation(s)	That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to: 1. Note the report; 2. Provide feedback on the Member Induction Programme 2025/26 and how the Council may better engage Members in Member learning and development opportunities.
Corporate priorities	• Putting Residents First • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services

| Consultation | All Members via the Member Learning and Development Survey. |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report updates the Audit and Governance Committee on Member learning and development activities in 2025/26. It also seeks feedback from the Committee on how the Council may better engage Members in Member learning and development opportunities so that sessions will be well attended going forwards.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Audit and Governance Committee has a responsibility to promote, maintain and assist the achievement of high standards of conduct by Councillors and Co-opted Members in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct for Members. This includes a responsibility to secure adequate and appropriate training on the Members' Code of Conduct.

2.2 The Committee last received an update on learning and development activities in March 2025.

3. MEMBER SURVEY FEEDBACK

3.1 A Member Development, Learning and Support requirement survey was sent out to all Members, and was completed over a period of roughly two months – from 14 August 2025 to 15 October 2025. 20 Members completed the survey.

3.2 The survey results which are relevant to future Member learning and development activities are included at Annex A and have helped to inform the proposed Member Induction Programme for 2026/27 which is included at Annex C.

3.3 The survey responses highlighted the following main points;

3.3.1 The majority of Members feel that their learning and development needs are being met.

3.3.2 The majority of Members are satisfied with the frequency and topics of Member Briefings, and many prefer hybrid or virtual formats for learning and development sessions, suggesting flexibility in delivery is valued.

3.3.3 Time constraints and external commitments were common barriers to participation identified by respondents. 60% of survey respondents stated that their preferred time slot was Thursday 5:30pm (the existing option). However, the day and time preferences were split between respondents, with no clear preferred option.

4. MEMBER BRIEFINGS AND LEARNING AND DEVLOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Statistics on Briefings are included in Annex B of the report.

4.1.1 25 Members attended Council learning and development sessions in 2025

4.1.2 40 Members attended 1 or more all Member briefings

4.1.3 20 Members attended 5 or more all Member briefings

Table 1: Summary of Member Learning and Development Attendance

Learning and Development Sessions	No. of attendees
8 May 25 Planning: Local Plan, Structure, vision, Objectives	19
21 May 25 Planning Training	28
22 May 25 Planning - Settlement Specific Policies & Development Areas	24
5 June 2025 Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner Presentation	13
12 June 25 Licensing Training	9
8 July 25 Chairing Skills	7
10 July 25 Audit, Fraud and Risk Awareness	6
15 July 25 Scrutiny Essentials	5
24 July 25 Questioning Skills	4
11 Sept 25 Licensing Training 2nd session	3
25 Sept 25 Statement of Accounts	6
16 Oct 25 Statement of Accounts Pt 2	3

4.2   As in previous years, a suite of online training courses is available to elected Members through the Council's iHASCO e-learning platform. This training is entirely optional and Members are able to access the courses via the Councillor Portal at their own convenience. To date take up remains very low, with only one Councillor having completed any courses since May 2025. The survey completed by Members shows that a quarter of respondents did not know what iHASCO was. Information on iHASCO will be included in the Induction Packs for new Members and an email will be sent to existing Members.

4.3   Following cyber attacks at other local authorities, the link to the Council's cyber security course was re-circulated to all Members. To date 23 Members have completed the training. This training is not mandatory for Members but is essential in protecting the Council's cyber security and Members have been urged to complete the training and an in-person session to be undertaken by the Data Protection Officer is in the process of being finalised.

4.4   Officers have organised a series of Member briefings which have taken place on Thursday evenings. Most of these are held online via Microsoft Teams and are mostly recorded.

4.5   The attendance for individual Member Briefings over the year has been between 7 and 22 Members. The topics and attendance figures are included at Annex B of the report.

4.6   There was higher attendance the start of the programme with strong engagement, especially with Local Plan and planning-related briefings. However, it appears that there has been a gradual decline in attendance since October. It is noted that this gradual decline coincides with an increase in frequency from monthly to weekly and might be due to Briefing 'fatigue' or Members being more selective with which Briefings they attend.

4.7 Recording the sessions does not seem to negatively impact attendance and virtual sessions seem to have slightly higher attendance than in-person only Briefings.

4.8 Members of the Audit and Governance Committee are asked to provide feedback on the schedule and relevance of Member Briefings and provide suggestions on any way attendance at these could be increased.

5. INDICATIVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR 2026/27

5.1 The Member Induction Programme is at Annex C of the report. This Programme has been informed by the experience from previous years and feedback provided by Members who responded to the survey. Most of this training is aimed primarily at new Councillors following elections in May but all Members are highly encouraged to attend.

5.2 Training related to regulatory committees must be completed by Members prior to sitting on the Committee. All Members are highly encouraged to attend Planning and Licensing Training as it is a pre-requisite to substituting on the relevant Committee.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council has allocated a budget of £8,000 per annum for Member Learning and Development. This is sufficient to fund a small number of externally provided sessions per year (e.g. Chairing Skills and Overview and Scrutiny training), with funding available for Members to attend external training courses, where it relates to their responsibilities as a Councillor and with the agreement of their Group Leader.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There is no legal requirement for the Council to provide Member learning and development opportunities but doing so is considered to be good corporate governance and member support practice. Member training on regulatory functions (e.g. planning, licensing and standards) is important for ensuring that decisions taken will be sound and reduce the risk of decisions being successfully challenged.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 If Members are not trained in areas such as the Code of Conduct and social media there is a risk of an increase in the number of complaints against Members.

8.2 If Members taking planning, licensing and standards decisions are not trained on those functions there is an increased risk of decisions being successfully challenged, which can be costly for the Council and result in negative publicity.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1 Learning, development and Briefings sessions are intended to cater for Members' varying needs and preferences. As part of the training survey, Members were asked if they require any reasonable adjustments related to a physical or mental health condition or disability.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Where appropriate, learning, development and Briefing sessions are held online to minimise travel emissions. There are no other climate and ecological emergencies implications arising from this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None.

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