



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	<b>AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE</b>
Subject	<b>MEMBER TRAINING</b>
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Mathew Parkinson, Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery Email: <a href="mailto:Mathew.Parkinson@westoxon.gov.uk">Mathew.Parkinson@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Andrew Brown, Business Manager for Democratic Services Email: <a href="mailto:Andrew.Brown@publicagroup.uk">Andrew.Brown@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report author	Andrew Brown, Business Manager for Democratic Services Email: <a href="mailto:Andrew.Brown@publicagroup.uk">Andrew.Brown@publicagroup.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To update the Committee on the plans for member training post-election and the recommendations of the Standards Sub-Committee relating to equality and diversity and social media training for members.
Annexes	Annex A – Draft member induction and training programme
Recommendation(s)	<p><i>That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>1. Note and comment on the report and the draft member induction and training programme (Annex A).</i></li><li><i>2. Agree that training on equality and diversity awareness, the use of social media, and the Members' Code of Conduct are made mandatory for all councillors and should be undertaken at least once in a councillor's term of office, within six months of their election.</i></li><li><i>3. Agree to receive future reports on member training that name any councillors who have not attended mandatory training.</i></li><li><i>4. Request that the Constitution Working Group considers recommending to Council amendments to the Constitution to reflect the requirements for councillors to attend mandatory training.</i></li></ol>
Corporate priorities	Working Together for West Oxfordshire

Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Chief Executive Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery

## 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 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 of councillors and co-opted members on the Code of Conduct for Members.

1.2 This report is presented to the Committee in response to the following resolution which was made at a meeting of the Standards Sub-Committee on 22 February 2023:

*To recommend that the Audit and Governance Committee considers an officer report on member training and development and that equality and diversity awareness training, and training on the use of social media, are made mandatory for all Councillors and should be undertaken on a regular basis.*

1.3 The Committee is recommended to note and comment on the report and the draft member induction and training programme which is attached at Annex A.

## DRAFT MEMBER TRAINING AND INDUCTION PROGRAMME

2. At the local elections on 4 May 2023, 17 of the 49 seats on the Council will be up for election. In preparation for supporting councillors post-election officers have drawn up a draft member training and induction programme, which is attached at Annex A. The draft programme includes some planned induction and training sessions which are specifically aimed at new councillors, as well as sessions that are aimed at all councillors, or councillors with certain responsibilities (e.g. members of planning and licensing committees who must attend the relevant training prior to determining any application).

2.1 It is proposed that new councillors will be invited to attend a choice of two welcome sessions to be held at different times of day on the Wednesday after the elections. Returning councillors will also be more than welcome to attend these sessions. It is proposed that the welcome sessions include, among other things, a light touch training session on the Code of Conduct for Members. This would be followed with more in-depth Code of Conduct training in the summer once the Council's incoming Monitoring Officer is in post.

- 2.2** In addition to training provided by the Council, either directly or indirectly, councillors will be signposted to other training resources such as training sessions and webinars hosted by the Local Government Association, some of which are highlighted in Annex A.
- 2.3** The Standards Sub-Committee has recommended that training on equality and diversity and social media are made mandatory for all councillors and should be undertaken regularly. The recommendation arose from a hearing where a (now former) councillor was found to have breached the Code of Conduct for Members in respect of respect and bullying.
- 2.4** The Council's Communication Team has previously offered social media training for councillors, although to date such training has been poorly attended. The Council would need to engage a specialist external provider to deliver equality and diversity training for councillors. The going rate for an external trainer is c. £2k including VAT.
- 2.5** It is not currently mandatory under the Council's Constitution for councillors to undertake training on the Code of Conduct for Members, although this has been strongly encouraged. The Committee, in view of its role in securing adequate training on the Code of Conduct for Members, is recommended to consider making Code of Conduct training mandatory for all councillors.

### **3. FREQUENCY OF MANDATORY TRAINING**

- 3.1** The Committee may wish to form a view on how regularly councillors should attend training on social media, equality and diversity, and the Code of Conduct for Members. The Committee may wish to consider what frequency is sufficient to ensure that all councillors can be trained to the required standard and that training will be well attended, bearing in mind that some members may choose not to engage with social media at all, for example. Options would be for such training to be delivered:
- annually
  - biennially
  - once in a members' term of office (i.e. every 4 years).
- 3.2** Where the training is delivered by an external provider holding the training more frequently increases cost, whereas for training delivered internally the impact will be on officer time.
- 3.3** It is recommended that all councillors are required to attend mandatory training on social media, equality and diversity and the Code of Conduct for Members once in their term of office, within six months of their election.

### **4. SANCTION FOR NON-ATTENDANCE OF MANDATORY TRAINING**

- 4.1** Consideration should be given to what making councillor attendance at training would mean in practice and what sanction could be applied to any member who failed to attend mandatory training.
- 4.2** It is recommended that the Committee receives regular reports on member training and that such reports name any members who have not undertaken mandatory training. If the committee agrees to the frequency of mandatory training being once in a councillor's term

of office within six months of their election then such reports would be presented to the Committee in election years after the six months have passed.

## **5. OTHER SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEW MEMBERS**

- 5.1 It is intended that the Business Manager for Democratic Services will in April write to election candidates, and separately to serving councillors who are not up for election, with details of the induction and training programme, including key induction and training dates.
- 5.2 All councillors elected on 4 May will be issued with a welcome pack at the count which will contain useful information about the Council and being a councillor. The welcome pack will also be available digitally.
- 5.3 New members will be allocated a “buddy” from the Democratic Services Team who will act as their first point of contact for general support for a few months as they settle into their role as a councillor.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Council has allocated a budget of £4,000 per annum for member training. This is sufficient to fund two externally-provided training sessions per year. Alternatively the funding may be apportioned to groups to enable members to attend external training courses.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There is no legal requirement for the Council to make member training mandatory but doing so may be considered good corporate governance and member support practice.

## **8. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 If members are not trained on the Code of Conduct there is a risk of an increase in the number of complaints against members.

## **9. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 10. All newly elected councillors will be invited to declare any special requirements relating to the provision of training and Democratic Services will work with the individual to ensure that any such needs are met.

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no climate and ecological emergencies implications arising from this report.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1 None.

(END)