



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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| Name and date of Committee | AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 27 MARCH 2025 |
| Subject | MEMBER TRAINING UPDATE 2024/25 |
| 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 Email: Andrea.McCaskie@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Report author | Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Summary/Purpose | To update the Committee on the member training activities in 2024/25. |
| Annexes | Annex A – Member training attendance 2024/25 Annex B – Member briefing topics and attendance 2024/25 Annex C – Indicative Member briefing programme 2025/26 |
| Recommendation(s) | That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the report;2. Provide feedback on how the Council may better engage members in member training and development. |
| Corporate priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• Working Together for West Oxfordshire |
| Key Decision | NO |
| Exempt | NO |
| Consultees/ Consultation | N/A |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates the Audit and Governance Committee on member training activities in 2024/25. It also seeks feedback from the Committee on how the Council may better engage members in member training and development 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 of councillors and co-opted members on the Code of Conduct for Members.

3. MEMBER INDUCTION PROGRAMME

- 3.1 At the local elections on 2 May 2024, 17 of the 49 seats on the Council were up for election. New members were 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 were also be more than welcome to attend these sessions which included, among other things, training on the Code of Conduct for Members. The following skills-based training was also made available to Members:

- Planning skills (mandatory for members of the Development Control Committee)
- Licensing (mandatory for members of the Licensing Committee)
- Introduction to the Council's finances
- Communications and social media
- Equality and diversity
- Audit and fraud awareness (for members of the Audit and Governance Committee)

4. FURTHER MEMBER TRAINING AND BRIEFING OPPORTUNITIES

- 4.1 A suite of online training courses was made available to elected members through the Council's iHASCO Learning Management System. This training is entirely optional and members are able to access the range of e-learning courses via the Councillor Portal at their own convenience. To date take up has been very low.
- 4.2 All councillors have been asked to complete an online cyber security course called "Cyber Ninjas" to mitigate the risks around cyber attacks. An in-person session was also held in September 2024 to try to ensure that all members could access this training. The initial Cyber Ninjas course was followed up by a 15-minute online refresher course.
- 4.3 Democratic Services have continued to facilitate regular member briefing sessions on issues or services that are likely to be of interest to Members. These sessions are normally held remotely on Teams and are recorded for the benefit of members who are unable to attend at the given time. The topics and attendance figures for 2024/25 are shown in Annex B and the programme for the coming period is attached at Annex C.

5. INDICATIVE TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR 2025/26

- 5.1** While 2025 is a non-election year for the District Council there will be a by-election held on 1 May 2025 for the Standlake, Aston and Stanton Harcourt ward. An induction session will be provided to the successful candidate, whether they are a new or returning Member. The same would apply if there were further by-elections during 2025/26.
- 5.2** Officers also plan to arrange the following training, some of which will be specific to particular member roles but all of which will be open to all Members:
- Planning refresher (mandatory for members of the Development Control Committee)
 - Licensing refresher (mandatory for members of the Licensing Committee)
 - Audit and fraud awareness (for members of the Audit and Governance Committee)
 - Overview and scrutiny / questioning skills (for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
 - Chaining skills

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 (e.g. chaining skills and Overview and Scrutiny training).

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** There is no legal requirement for the Council to provide member training 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 on the Code of Conduct, social media and equality and diversity 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** Training and briefings are intended to cater for members' varying needs and preferences.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1** Where appropriate, training and briefing sessions are held online to minimise travel emissions. There are no other climate and ecological emergencies implications arising from this report.

II. BACKGROUND PAPERS

II.1 None.

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