

Member training

The working group interviewed the council's training manager to determine the current situation and the best way forward for member training on council finance.

Members' inductions have always included information on council finance as part of a suite of modules. The finance module, however, was voluntary. On 23rd June 2005, the council decided to ask the Constitution and Accounts committee to prepare an amendment to the constitution with the effect that "from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within twelve months of their appointment". It is envisaged that this will require a number of training sessions for essential core knowledge issues. In order to achieve full training for members, different methods and arrangements for training will have to be explored.

Comment

"New members were competing with the experienced members. New members should be given the choice whether to attend their own session or a session with experienced members".

Responses to recent training request sheets had shown improvement uptake of training by members. The issue to resolve was how much detail should be included in induction and training before getting into operational matters. Also, training arrangements at the moment mainly involved a set of sessions repeated throughout the year. This may need to be examined in the future.

The council has not yet fully explored using online training material. The training manager explained to the working group that preparation time for this is considerably more than for face-to-face sessions. It may attract some members and has a useful place in a range of training arrangements but it is believed to not be very popular. Personal interaction, which can help boost confidence, is lost for online learning. This is especially important for new members.

Comment

"I found the induction training sessions very wearing, they were long and rooms were crowded and there wasn't much opportunity to question officers. Shorter meetings with fewer members would have been better".

The working group considered timing of member training sessions to encourage attendance. The training manager had just piloted a training session starting at 4.30p.m. on the new training session options. In the past, sessions had been provided before other meetings to make it easier for members. This had not been as popular as expected and considerable wastage had been caused. Preferred times had been asked for but such a wide range of responses were received. This is supported by the working group's questionnaire to all members, which, although showing a general preference towards sessions at any time held in Grantham, demonstrated a broad range of preferences for training sessions. The training manager considered that trialling member sessions at different locations throughout the district could be successful.

The member survey also identified a desire for further training on council finance matters. 22 out of 30 respondents said that they would benefit from additional training in council finance.

Recommendation:

(8) That the Constitution and Accounts committee be recommended that basic understanding of council finance matters be included as an essential training module for all members from May 2007. Optional modules can be provided for higher levels of competency if there is such a demand. Further training in the council's financial affairs should be made available on a regular basis to all members and at variable times, durations and locations.