

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

31ST MARCH 2009

TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR PARISH COUNCILS

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor Roger Smith
Responsible Head of Service	Claire Felton, Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Standards Committee which took place on 16th October 2008 the Committee was asked to consider the issue of developing a training programme for the parish councils on ethical governance issues. It was agreed that officers should liaise with the parish councils, via both the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils ("CALC") and the Parish Councils' Forum, on the development of such a training programme.
- 1.2 Officers have now carried out the required consultation for this and the Committee is therefore asked to approve the proposal for the establishment of an ethical governance training programme for the parish councils.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended:

- 2.1 that the Committee approve the proposal for the establishment of an ethical governance training programme for the parish councils;
- 2.2 that the Monitoring Officer be charged with formulating such a training programme, based on the wishes of the parish councils and in accordance with the general terms outlined in this report, together with any additional recommendations put forward by the Standards Committee;
- 2.3 that details of the final training programme be referred to the Standards Committee for information; and
- 2.4 that authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Standards Committee, to make any necessary changes to the training programme in the light of any significant changes to the Members' Code of Conduct and/or new guidance/legislation issued in relation to ethical governance.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As part of its statutory duty the Standards Committee, via the District Council's Monitoring Officer, is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards by Members (both district and parish) and co-opted Members of the authority. The Committee also assists Members and co-opted Members in observing the Members' Code of Conduct. In carrying out these functions the Standards Committee ensures that Members are appropriately trained on the Members' Code of Conduct and associated ethical governance issues.
- 3.2 In addition to inviting parish council representatives to relevant training sessions at the Council House, some of which have been conducted as part of the District Council's Modern Councillor Programme, the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer have, when requested, held workshop sessions at parish councils on the Code of Conduct and declaring interests.
- 3.3 In order to build upon the training which has taken place to date, the Standards Committee is asked to consider developing a training programme for parish councils on ethical governance issues. Any training conducted as part of the District Council's training programme would be in addition to, and complement, training which is run for the parish councils by either the National Association of Local Councils ("NALC") or the Worcestershire CALC. Representatives of the parish councils will also continue to be invited to any relevant courses which are being run as part of the District Council's Modern Councillor Programme. Officers have been advised that the Worcestershire CALC intends to establish a 'Worcestershire Training Partnership' to allow relevant potential training providers within the county to meet to discuss training issues. Worcestershire CALC has not yet set its training programme for 2009, so any training dates set by the District Council will not conflict with CALC.
- 3.4 At its meeting on 3rd December 2008 the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the Worcestershire CALC considered the District Council's proposal to establish a training programme for the parish councils and general enthusiasm was expressed by the parish councils for this. The Area Committee felt that training should take place within the parishes, in clusters of three or four parishes at a time, and that a programme of visits should be established in order that parish councillors who missed their local sessions could attend a separate session elsewhere. The areas which were deemed to be of particular interest/relevance for training were as follows:
- personal and prejudicial interests – including the Register of Members' Interests;
 - 'dual-hatted' Members (those who serve on more than one relevant authority and other public bodies); and
 - bias and predetermination.

- 3.5 A report detailing the views of the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the Worcestershire CALC was considered by the Parish Councils' Forum on 6th January 2009. The Forum agreed with the views expressed by the Area Committee. A request was made at the Forum for training to be provided on a planning related issue, which the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised could be looked at separately, but which would not form part of the ethical governance training programme.
- 3.6 In addition to the topics listed under paragraph 3.4, the Committee is asked to consider whether there are any further areas of training which should be included in the training programme. A general overview of the Code of Conduct, particularly in light of proposed changes to this, would be included in the training sessions. Further training might also include:
- complaints against parish councillors; and
 - equality and diversity.
- 3.7 As well as conducting training sessions for the parish councils, the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer will continue to work closely with the parish councils on ethical governance issues generally and to provide guidance and support when requested.
- 3.8 As there are 20 parish councils within the district it is suggested that for training session purposes these be divided into North, South, East and West regions, with the Monitoring Officer to determine the final geographical splits for these. Depending on the number of agreed areas of required training, consideration will need to be given as to the frequency of training sessions, bearing in mind that the training will be conducted by the Monitoring Officer and/or Deputy Monitoring. Given that at least four separate sessions will need to be held for each of the subject areas, officers are of the view that it would be appropriate for all four sessions to be held consecutively over a period of approximately 6 to 8 weeks and to then move onto a separate subject area once all sessions for a particular subject have been completed. In addition to ensuring that all parishes will be receiving similar training in close proximity, this will also assist officers in the delivery of training as they will be able to focus on one topic at a time. Ideally training sessions will rotate between different parish councils within a particular region, although this will depend on the availability of venues.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As it is anticipated that any training will be conducted by either the Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer, and that training will take place at parish council venues, there are no financial implications associated with this report, save for officer time in preparing for and delivering the training.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Sections 63-56 of Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 set out the requirements for standards committees. Section 50 of the said Act also introduced primary legislation to enable the implementation of a Members' Code of Conduct.

6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

This report is linked to Council objective 2 – Improvement.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 The main risk associated with the details included in this report is:

- the risk of complaints about elected Members.

7.2 This risk is being managed as follows:

- Risk Register: Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Key Objective Ref No: 3
Key Objective: Effective ethical governance

8. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

None

9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

None

10. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

None

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues	None
Personnel Implications	None
Governance/Performance Management	None
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998	None
Policy	None

Environmental	None
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12. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	No
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects	No
Executive Director - Services	No
Assistant Chief Executive	No
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	No
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

13. WARDS AFFECTED

All wards

14. APPENDICES

None

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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