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| <u>Committee and Date</u> Standards Committee 8 July 2009 | <u>Item</u> 6 | <u>Paper</u> D |
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TRAINING FOR PARISH/TOWN COUNCILS

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Summary

This report provides an analysis of the training for parish/town Councillors in Shropshire in January, February and March 2009, and suggests a way forward for continuing with ethics and probity training for all parish/town councils.

Recommendations

- A. That further training on the Code of Conduct and the local assessment of complaints be offered to parish/town councils within Shropshire during the next nine months, to be aimed at the 93.16% of members who did not attend previously. Similarly all parish clerks should be encouraged to attend.
- B. That consideration be given to arranging training on a "cluster" basis in certain geographical areas and/or with those parish clerks responsible for more than one council, or by some other means which will attract better attendance.
- C. That specific training be provided for Parish/Town Councils identified as having endemic problems in respect of ethics and probity issues.
- D. That any training provided be carried out in liaison with SALC.

REPORT

General

1. Six training sessions were provided at separate locations in Shropshire for all parish/town councillors and clerks in respect of "Ethical Governance". The sessions were provided by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer and covered ethical governance and decision making; a refresher on the Code of Conduct, and an explanation of the new procedure for the local assessment of complaints.

2. The training sessions were held from late January through to March 2009, in conjunction with SALC.
3. The information shown below is an analysis of the training provided at the six locations and how to proceed with further training for parish/town councils in the future.

(1) SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM AREA AT SHIREHALL – 20 JANUARY 2009

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Bayston Hill PC | - 3 members plus Clerk |
| Bicton PC | - Clerk |
| Church Pulverbatch PC | - 1 member plus Clerk |
| Great Hanwood PC | - 1 member |
| Longden PC | - 1 member |
| Welshampton & Lyneal | - 1 member |
| Much Wenlock TC | - 1 member plus Clerk |
| Shawbury PC | - 1 member |
| (Clerk – SALC) | |

(2) NORTH SHROPSHIRE AREA AT WEM – 4 FEBRUARY 2009

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Prees PC | - 3 members plus Clerk |
| Whixall PC | - 5 members plus Clerk |
| Whitchurch TC | - 2 members |
| Adderley PC | - 1 member |
| Ellesmere TC | - 3 members |
| Myddle & Broughton PC | - 4 members plus Clerk |
| Shawbury PC | - 1 member plus Clerk |
| Wem TC | - 4 members plus Clerk |
| Welshampton & Lyneal PC | - Clerk |

(3) OSWESTRY AREA AT GUILDHALL OSWESTRY – 10 FEBRUARY 2009

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| Ellesmere TC | - 3 members |
| St Martins PC | - 4 members |
| West Felton PC | - 2 members |
| Oswestry TC | - 3 members |
| Selattyn & Gobowen PC | - 2 members |
| Oswestry Rural PC | - 2 members |

(4) SOUTH SHROPSHIRE AREA AT CRAVEN ARMS – 3 MARCH 2009

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Rushbury PC | - 4 members |
| Church Stretton TC | - 6 members |
| Craven Arms PC | - 4 members |
| Lydbury North PC | - 5 members |
| Hopesay PC | - 3 members |

Newcastle PC - 2 members

(5) SOUTH SHROPSHIRE AREA AT LUDLOW – 17 MARCH 2009

Hopton Cageford & Stoke St
Milborough PC - 1 member

Milson & Need Sollars PC - 1 member
Rushbury PC - 2 members
Culmington PC - 3 members

(6) BRIDGNORTH AREA AT CASTLE HALL BRIDGNORTH – 30 MARCH 2009

Bridgnorth TC - 6 members
Chetton PC, Billingsley etc
PC, Aston Botterell PC, - Clerk to 4 Parishes
Eardington PC
Claverley PC - 1 member
Kinlet PC - 6 members plus Clerk
Shifnal TC - Clerk
Stottendon & Sidbury PC - 3 members plus Clerk
Clee St Margaret PC - 1 member
Highley PC - 1 member
+ 2 members of Bridgnorth Civic
Society

4. **Parish/Town Councils not Represented at Training Session**

(a) Shrewsbury & Atcham Area

25 Parish Councils (out of 30) had no members in attendance at the training session. Up to 258 members across this area were not in attendance.

(b) North Shropshire Area

23 Parish Councils (out of 33) had no members in attendance at the training session. Up to 295 members across this area were not in attendance.

(c) Oswestry Area

8 Parish Councils (out of 13) had no members in attendance at the training session. Up to 139 members across this area were not in attendance.

(d) South Shropshire Area (2 Sessions)

31 Parish Councils (out of 41) had no members in attendance at the training sessions. Up to 337 members across this area were not in attendance.

(e) Bridgnorth Area

29 Parish Councils (out of 35) had no members in attendance at the training session, although 5 parish councils were represented by their clerks. Up to 294 members across this area were not in attendance.

5. **Statistics**

The total number of parish/town council seats across the County is 1,417. Of this number only 97 parish/town council members attended one of the six venues training sessions offered. This equates to 6.84% only of the total membership.

16 parish/town councils were represented by their clerks out of a potential 152, although the training was aimed principally at the membership.

6. **Conclusions**

The attendance at the training sessions was disappointing although the seminar questionnaire results from those who did attend are very encouraging. The overall impression (based on the six sessions) indicated half of attendees felt the seminar to be excellent and half felt it to be very good. No one scored it low.

Many felt it to be relevant, practical, challenging, useful, motivating and enjoyable in terms of seminar content with everyone commenting that the length of the seminar was correct.

Having in mind that only 97 parish/town councillors attended out of a potential of 1,417 it will be necessary to repeat the offer of training on the Code of Conduct and the local assessment of complaints about member conduct.

When the 2007 Code of Conduct was introduced the former District and Borough Councils provided training for parish councils thereon on a "cluster" basis with a group of 5 or 6 parish councils situated geographically close to each other, forming each cluster. The cluster would meet at a suitable venue. This proved to be successful. A further option might be to offer training on the Code to a group of parishes who each employ the same clerk (e.g. one person is clerk of four parish councils in the Bridgnorth area).

In addition there may be a small number of parish/town councils who have issues in respect of member conduct which may be endemic. These should be addressed perhaps by training provision specific to the relevant councils.

Whatever options are explored for future training on ethics and probity for parish/town councils, these should be implemented in liaison/conjunction with SALC.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Attendance list for members/clerks at training sessions and seminar material.

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The proposals within this report are to be adhered to voluntarily.

Environmental Appraisal

N/A

Risk Management Appraisal

It is vital to ensure high standards of conduct from elected and co-opted members of parish/town councils. A failure to do so will undermine the public's trust in their local councillors and Councils.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

N/A

Member Champion

N/A

Local Member

All areas of the County.

Appendices