



Committee and date
Standards Committee

28 January 2010

Item No

9

Public

TRAINING FOR (I) THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND (II) PARISH/TOWN COUNCILS

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Summary

This report provides some feedback on training offered to members of the Standards Committee and to members and officers of Parish/Town Councils in Shropshire, as part of a rolling programme, during autumn 2009.

Recommendations

- A. That the report be noted and that the continuance of the rolling programme of training for parish/town councils across the remainder of Shropshire be endorsed.

Report

General

1. Standards Committee

Two training sessions were provided for all members of the Standards Committee in September on the local assessment of complaints procedure. Eighteen members of the Committee attended one of the sessions offered (the other being an alternative date). I feel this was an extremely worthwhile seminar to put on and trust that members derived information and knowledge which will ably equip them in their work as members of the Standards Committee.

Officers were also of the view that discussions during the seminar evoked a number of pertinent questions from which the local assessment process could benefit.

2. On 26 August 2009, training was provided for independent members of Standards Committee on chairmanship skills. Six independent members attended what was a very useful and interactive session. There was positive feedback on the session particularly with regard to body language in meetings and how to deal effectively with difficult members of a committee.
 3. Shropshire Council Members

During the past few months I have held a number of "one to one", or "one to three" training sessions with other members of the Council who were not able to attend on the dates held last June or July when ethical governance, the Code of Conduct and local assessment of complaints were the subject of discussion.

There are approximately ten councillors outstanding who have not received the training and I shall be contacting them individually.
 4. Parish/Town Councils

Members will recall that at the last meeting of the Committee, it was agreed that further training in ethics and probity for all parish/town councils should be provided as part of a "rolling programme" across Shropshire. Furthermore this training would be arranged on a "cluster" basis in certain geographical areas and/or with those parish clerks who were responsible for more than one council.
 5. It was also agreed that specific training would be provided for parish/town councils identified as having endemic problems in respect of ethics and probity issues.
 6. The "rolling programme" of training commenced in September 2009 and some seven sessions have been held over a three month period in accordance with the strategy outlined above. It is the intention to resume the programme in the early Spring 2010 with a view to covering the whole of the Unitary Council area on a cluster by cluster basis.
 7. The information shown below gives dates, venues and attendance figures for each of the training sessions held so far. The training sessions were conducted by me and/or the Deputy Monitoring Officer and my staff and covered ethical governance and decision making; the Code of Conduct and its implications for parish/town councillors; and the procedures to be followed in the local assessment of complaints about member conduct.
- (i) Comrades' Club, Ellesmere – 14 September 2009
- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Ellesmere Council | - 5 members plus Acting Clerk |
| Hordley Parish Council | - 1 member |
| Cockshutt Parish Council | -2 members |

Welshampton & Lyneal
Parish Council - 2 members
Whittington Parish Council - 4 members

(ii) Methodist Church Hall, West Felton – 24 September 2009

This training session was provided specifically for members of West Felton Parish Council, prior to the commencement of their Council meeting. 6 members of the parish council attended. (See other report on agenda).

(iii) Guildhall, Shrewsbury – 1 October 2009

Shrewsbury Town Council - 7 members plus Clerk
Bayston Hill Parish Council - 2 members
Bomere Heath Parish Council - 2 members plus Clerk
Bicton Parish Council - 1 member plus Clerk
Conover Parish Council - 5 members
Great Hanwood Parish Council - 1 member

(iv) Council Chamber, Oswestry – 8 October 2009

Ellesmere Rural Parish Council - 3 members plus Clerk
Oswestry Town Council - 6 members
Selattyn & Gobowen Parish
Council - 3 members
St. Martins Parish Council - 1 member
Weston Rhyn Parish Council - 1 member
West Felton Parish Council - 1 member

(v) Severn Centre Highley – 5 November 2009

Highley Parish Council - 10 members plus Clerk
Chelmarsh Parish Council - None
Billingsley Group Parish
Council - None
Aston Botterell Burwarton
& Cleobury Parish Council - None
Stottesdon & Sidbury Parish
Council - 6 members plus Clerk
Kinlet Parish Council - 7 members
Eardington Parish Council - None

(vi) Council Offices, Market Drayton – 23 November 2009

Market Drayton Town Council - 9 members plus Clerk & Deputy Clerk
Adderley Parish Council - None
Sutton-upon-Tern Parish
Council - None
Norton-in-Hales Parish Council - 4 members

Moreton Saye Parish Council - None
Woore Parish Council - 2 members plus Clerk

(vii) Guildhall, Shrewsbury – 25 November 2009

The session was specifically requested by the Chairman of the Central Planning Committee for representatives of the following parish councils:-

Alberbury with Cardeston PC - 2 members
Ford Parish Council - 3 members
Hanwood Parish Council - 1 member
Longden Parish Council - Clerk
Minsterley Parish Council - 3 members
Pontesbury Parish Council - 5 members

A representative from the CPRE was also in attendance plus a member of the Shropshire Council Community Working Team.

8. With regard to the training sessions in (i), (iii)-(vi) above personal invitations were sent to all parish/town councillors and clerks for each of the 30 parish/town councils listed. This totalled some 343. Actual attendance figures amounted to 94 for these five sessions.
9. Whilst the attendance figures for the training sessions were disappointing it is acknowledged that finding dates which are suitable for all of the parish/town councils in any one cluster are not always achievable. Any parishes who have missed out as a result of this will have an opportunity to attend future training sessions.
10. Attendees at the training sessions were all of the view that the seminar content was excellent and relevant to their roles as parish/town councillors.
11. Concerns were however expressed by a number of attendees about part of the local assessment procedures.

These were:-

- (a) that a subject member (i.e. the member complained about) was not able to receive full details of the complaint made against him/her unless the Assessment Sub-Committee or Review Sub-Committee agreed that the Monitoring Officer should investigate the complaint. At this stage, the subject member will be given full details of the complaint.
- (b) that a subject member is "guilty until proved innocent" under this system.
- (c) that the lengthy process of local assessment causes anxiety for the subject member, who, if innocent, is unable to clear his/her

name at an early stage, particularly if the complainant, from the outset, informs the press/media with details of the complaint.

12. The issues referred to in 11 above have been discussed previously at the Standards for England Annual Conference. Those matters have also been mentioned in the Standards for England Bulletin 46, a copy of which was circulated to all members in December 2009. Conference delegates similarly acknowledged the difficulties which arise from the legislative process within which local assessment of complaints has to operate.
13. Our experience to date is that the local complaints procedure appears to be working well. There have not been any adverse comments about how these have been dealt with, nor even any from subject members or complainants regarding the fairness or timescale of the system.
14. Conclusions

Whilst the attendance figures at the cluster group training sessions for the 30 parish/town councils provided so far are not as high as I would like, nevertheless 27.40% of parish councillors and clerks invited to attend did so. This figure compares favourably to the 6.84% of parish/town council members who turned out for similar training last winter.

The training course content was well received and despite the misgivings referred to in paragraph 11 above, the vast majority of attendees considered the training to be important, pertinent and illuminating.

Having in mind the positive approach to ethics training demonstrated by members of the 30 parish/town councils so far, I feel it prudent to continue with the rolling programme of training in the early Spring 2010, whilst exploring other options for future training on ethics and probity. Such options might include talk/advice to individual parish/town councils, should they request attendance by me or my staff at their meetings or training events.

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

Attendance lists 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

Contact: on

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Standards Committee, 28 January 2010: TRAINING FOR (I) THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND (II) PARISH/TOWN COUNCILS
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
Cabinet Member N/A
Local Member All areas of the County.
Appendices