

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Standards Committee

9 August 2006

AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Deputy Monitoring Officer

PROPOSAL FOR TRAINING OF PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMEN AND CLERKS

Purpose

1. Training of Parish Councillors is an important part of the remit of the Standards Committee. There are 101 Parish councils in South Cambridgeshire and all parish members need to be aware of the standards expected from local councillors under the Code of Conduct. A training needs survey was sent out to Parish Councils by the Deputy Monitoring Officer earlier this year and only 39 parish councils responded to the survey. The majority of parish clerks who responded stated that more training was essential for their members but also that there was some resistance among some parish councillors to any form of training on the Code of Conduct.

Training Plan

2. It is proposed that central training takes place at South Cambridgeshire Hall in Cambourne. Letters will be sent to all Parish Clerks noting that the event is being organised jointly by SCDC and CALC and partly sponsored by SCDC – fee for training for each attendee £20 a head.
3. There are three suggested options for providing. Training could be run as:
 - (a) A single one-off session
 - (b) Three sessions on the same day - morning (10 a.m.-12.30 p.m.), afternoon (2-4.30 p.m.) and evening (7-9.30p.m.)
 - (c) On two separate days with three sessions on each day. Those invited will be asked to tick a box giving their first and second preference for date and time and then places will be allocated accordingly.
4. Each session would consist of the following:
 - (a) A Welcome & Overview from the SCDC Monitoring Officer
 - (b) A talk by the Chairman of the SCDC Standards Committee on the Role of the Standards Committee and Local Investigations
 - (c) CALC – basics of the Code of Conduct and the Register of Interests
 - (d) Open session - “Experiences & Impressions of the Code of Conduct”
 - (e) Mock Scenarios – break into small groups with each group having a facilitator looking at two possible scenarios each
 - (f) Feedback Session – Spokesperson for each small group to feed back summary of discussions & general discussions
 - (g) Questions & Answers session with a Question Time panel of the Monitoring Officer, Chairman of Standards Committee & Keith Barrand from CALC
5. The dates of training events need to be agreed at the meeting of Standards Committee and members are asked to bring their diaries so that a date(s) can be fixed, in consultation with room availability. It is hoped that if Option C is adopted that all members of Standards Committee will be able to attend at least one session on each day to help facilitate the group discussions and show support.

Alternative means of training

6. Standards Committee Newsletter – Members may wish to consider the idea of sending out e-mail newsletters to parish clerks updating them with news and guidance on the Code of Conduct, which could then be circulated to parish members or discussed as a regular item on the agenda of a parish council meeting. This could be a valuable pro-active tool for reminding and updating parish members of their responsibilities under the Code. It could also be extended to District Council members.
7. It is also planned to investigate the production of a locally-focused training DVD in-house once the Review of the Code of Conduct has been announced. The DVD would look at 10/12 scenarios that may affect Parish Councils and a copy would be sent to every Parish Council so it could be played during a Parish Council meeting – this should ensure that as many parish councillors as possible across the district have received training.

Background Information

8. The Code of Conduct is in the process of being reviewed by Central Government and announcements are expected soon about the time frame for implementation of the review. It is expected that a further consultation process will take place on the detail of any proposed changes.
9. In its Annual Review the Standards Board has stated that it is looking for new ways to work with county associations and others to promote high standards at parish level and provide local training and support. It has made a joint bid for funding with NALC (The National Association of Local Councils) and SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks) to the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association's capacity building programme.
10. Three pilots are being developed as part of the bid:
 - (a) A diagnostic toolkit
 - (b) A peer mentoring programme
 - (c) A model compact between County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) and the standards committees of the principal authorities in the area.

Options

11.
 - (a) To host a single training event
 - (b) To host three sessions of training on the same day
 - (c) To host two days of training with three sessions in each day, held in two different weeks

Implications

12. Financial	The training will be self-funding
Legal	None
Staffing	Preparation and training time for Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer
Risk Management	None identified
Equal Opportunities	None

Consultations

13. CALC

Conclusions/Summary

14. Training of Parish Councils is an essential part of the remit of the Standards Committee.

15. There are a number of options available in terms of the scale of training we could offer. The Deputy Monitoring Officer recommends Option C as it offers training to the maximum number of parish councillors.

Recommendations

16. (a) To agree the general outline of training programme
(b) To adopt Option C as the method of training used
(c) To fix date/s for the training sessions
(d) To decide on the proposal to instigate a Standards Committee Newsletter

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Training Needs Survey of Parish Councils
Standards Board for England Annual Review 2005-06

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