

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Standards Committee 8 November 2006
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Deputy Monitoring Officer / Democratic Services Officer

UPDATE ON TRAINING PROGRAMME

Purpose

1. To update the Committee on progress with the training programme for:
 - (a) Code of Conduct Training for District Councillors
 - (b) Standards Committee training on Hearing Panels
 - (c) Training for Parish Council Clerks and Chairmen

Background

2. Training of District and Parish Councillors is an essential part of the remit of the Standards Committee. Training is also essential for Standards Committee members before sitting on a Standards Committee Hearing Panel.
3. At the last meeting of Standards Committee on 9 August:
 - (a) The Deputy Monitoring Officer was asked to liaise with the Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder to consider the quotations received from external trainers for training district councillors on the Code of Conduct
 - (b) The Deputy Monitoring Officer was asked to liaise with the Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder to discuss the best way forward for Standards Committee training
 - (c) The Deputy Monitoring Officer was asked to conduct a further consultation exercise with all Parish Councils in the district to ascertain preferences for training times and to seek views about charging a fee of £20 per delegate for training Chairmen and clerks of parish councils
 - (d) The Democratic Services Officer was asked to contact all Parish Councils to establish the demand for having a member of the Standards Committee visit their parish council meeting to give advice on Code of Conduct issues.
 - (e) Approval was given for the creation of a Standards Committee Newsletter to keep parish councils up-to-date with any changes to the legislation or guidance and to provide advice and guidance on Code of Conduct issues.

Considerations

4. The Government has indicated that the Revised Code of Conduct will be in place for the local government elections on 3rd May 2007, so that it can be adopted by Parish and District councillors shortly afterwards. The Revised Code is due to be published shortly and training can take place on the forthcoming changes as well as the existing Code. The Revised Code is expected to contain some important changes which will affect all members, in particular on what is deemed to be a prejudicial interest and

what members may say and do if they have such an interest. It will be essential for members to understand the ramifications of these changes before putting them into practice.

District Council and Standards Committee Training

5. Consultation with the Resources & Staffing Portfolio Holder has taken place where quotes from external trainers were examined against their proposed training plans. Both the Portfolio Holder and the Deputy Monitoring Officer felt that the training offered by Peter Keith-Lucas of Bevan Brittan solicitors in London was likely to be of the highest quality. Mr Keith-Lucas is the leading trainer in this area and has developed an excellent reputation for training on the Code of Conduct and Standards. He has trained and advised many local authorities across the country.
6. Attempts were made to arrange training before Christmas 2006 but due to the unavailability of the Council Chamber due to long-running inquiries and Mr Keith-Lucas's busy schedule it proved impossible. An agreement has now been reached with the Local Government Group (LGG) to co-ordinate the training with other neighbouring authorities to reduce the overall costs.
7. The training cost will be £50 per head for each attendee from South Cambridgeshire and the rest of the speaker's costs will be made up by charging other local authorities for their attendance. If all 57 district council members attend the Code of Conduct training along with three parish council members and five independent members of Standards Committee this will cost the council £3,250. The Standards Committee training will cost £750 for training all 15 members of the committee. These costs have been agreed with the Portfolio holder.
8. Training sessions can now be run on two days, Tuesday 30th January 2007 and Thursday 1 February 2007. These sessions have been booked with the trainer and the Council Chamber has also been booked. A Code of Conduct training session will take place from 10am until 1pm on each day and a Standards Committee training session from 2-4pm on each day. Members will be able to choose which session(s) they attend. If not all members are able to attend the training the cost to the council will be reduced as the numbers will be made up from other authorities.
9. It is anticipated that the Revised Code of Conduct will have been published by then and therefore members can be trained on the existing Code and the forthcoming changes. All members have already been notified of these dates by the Democratic Services Officers to give as much advance notice as possible.

Parish Council Training

10. The Deputy Monitoring Officer has written to Parish Council clerks asking for preferences on training days and times to be given along with an indication if Parish Councils are willing to pay a fee of £20 each for their Clerk and Chairman to attend the training session to cover costs. Responses have been requested from Parishes Council by 31 January 2007 and the replies will be collated and present to the next meeting of Standards Committee. Parish councils have also been notified of the Standards Committee webpage and asked to contribute general questions for a Monitoring Officer's Advice Page (any advice will not be case-specific) in the forthcoming Standards Committee Newsletter, which is aimed to be published quarterly following Standards Committee meetings.

11. The Democratic Services Officer has also written to Parish clerks asking for views on having a visit from a member of Standards Committee. Response are also due to be received by 31 January 2007 for report to the next Committee meeting.

Implications

12. Financial	Costs for each of the training courses has been agreed at £50 per head.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Risk Management	None
Equal Opportunities	None

Consultations

13. Resources & Staffing Portfolio Holder and Parish council clerks.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

14. Affordable Homes	None
Customer Service	None
Northstowe and other growth areas	None
Quality, Accessible Services	None
Village Life	None
Sustainability	None
Partnership	None

Conclusions/Summary

15. Training dates have been organised for both district council and standards committee training. It is hoped that the Committee will ratify this training programme and members will give priority to attending this training.
16. When responses are received from the parish councils on preferences for timing and cost of training preferences dates will be set for training sessions in consultation with the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils.

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

Letter & questionnaire sent to all Parish Council Clerks.

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