

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Standards Committee

22 February 2007

AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Democratic Services Officer

PROPOSAL FOR TRAINING OF PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMEN AND CLERKS

Purpose

1. To review the responses received to the parish council survey on training proposals and to consider what steps to take to provide the training sessions.

Background

2. The Standards Committee, at its meeting of 9 August 2006, received a report on proposals for training parish council chairmen and clerks, a copy of which is appended. Parish councils were surveyed on the proposals and asked to respond by 31 January 2007.
3. It was agreed by the Standards Committee that each session would consist of the following:
 - (a) A Welcome & Overview from the SCDC Monitoring Officer
 - (b) CALC – basics of the Code of Conduct and the Register of Interests
 - (c) A talk by the Chairman of the SCDC Standards Committee on the Role of the Standards Committee and Local Investigations
 - (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

Considerations

4. The Department for Communities and Local Government intends to bring the amended Code into force in time for local authorities to adopt it at their annual meetings in May 2007. The Standards Committee may wish to consider whether training should be scheduled before or after the adoption of the amended Code, noting that previous deadlines have not always been met and that it might be more useful to arrange the training according to the known election schedule.
5. Responses were received from 30 of 101 parishes and are summarised at **Appendix A**. The majority supported sending their parish clerk and chairman or other representative for a training session, although there was little consensus on the best date / time and proposed cost of the training.
6. The Standards Committee had agreed that a fee of £20 per delegate was reasonable and that attendees were likely to value training more highly if they had paid for it. The District Council did not have the resources available to provide training at no cost, nor could it afford to visit each parish council to provide individual training. The Deputy Monitoring Officer did consult the parish councils and meetings their views on having

one or more Standards Committee members attend a parish council meeting or a joint informal meeting with one or more parish councils, and the following responses were received:

- (a) Histon – “The Council feel this will need to be considered again after the training has been taken.”
- (b) Newton – “If someone can attend a council meeting with a short briefing (say 30 minutes) the Chair may invite them”
- (c) Rampton – “Council is however, happy for a representative to come to council to deliver the training at no cost to Rampton Parish Council.”
- (d) Sawston – “We wondered whether SCDC would be prepared to come out to the Sawston Parish Council office to train all our 19 councillors in one go. We could do this on Tues 30 Jan 2007 or 6 Feb 2007”
- (e) Willingham– “The Council would also like to invite a Standards Committee member to address them at a meeting early next year [2007]...The Council meets on the evening of the first Wednesday of the month, and would welcome a visit on the 7th March or the 4th April.”

Options

- 7. **Option A:** Based on the responses received, to schedule training for a Tuesday morning (first choice for 6 respondents) and for one other date, prior to the May elections, and to schedule one other training session after the May elections, all at the cost of £20 per delegate.
- 8. **Option B:** To schedule training after the May elections, on a Tuesday morning and on one other date, at the cost of £20 per delegate. Given the low number of responses received, it is unclear whether it would be best to offer two or three days of training. Offering two days only of training should lead to more attendees on each day, making the focus groups for mock scenarios more viable.
- 9. **Option C:** To seek the views of those parish councils and meetings who did not respond to the consultation in order to have a more complete set of responses before making a decision.

Implications

10.	Financial	The District Council could incur significant costs if no fee were charged and its total member training budget is £4,800, which has to cover all district councillor training in all areas and is insufficient to extend to providing free training for parish councils and meetings. The Standards Committee agreed in August 2006 that the training would be self-funding. Lack of training could lead to local investigations and hearings.
	Legal	None.
	Staffing	Preparation and training time by the Deputy Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer.
	Risk Management	Failure to provide uniform training could lead to confusion over the new Code of Conduct and its expectations, with potential for complaints and the subsequent financial and staffing costs of local investigations and hearings.

Equal Opportunities	Training materials can be provided in large-type or Braille if required, and can be made available on the Standards Committee website or in paper format for those unable to attend. Delegates will be asked in advance if they have any special needs, e.g., wheelchair access, to ensure that the meeting room is accessible.
---------------------	---

Consultations

- All South Cambridgeshire parish councils and meetings, the Standards Committee and the Cambridgeshire Association for Local Councils (CALC).

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

12.	Affordable Homes	None.
	Customer Service	The benefits from the training will be passed along to the communities served by the attending parish councils and meetings.
	Northstowe and other growth areas	None.
	Quality, Accessible Services	All attendees will receive
	Village Life	Residents in villages of participating will benefit from their parish councillors' understanding of the revised Code of Conduct.
	Sustainability	Prior to the training sessions a list of delegates from each authority could be circulated to assist attendees with car-sharing arrangements. Public transportation information could be issued with confirmation of the training dates and times.
	Partnership	The District Council and CALC jointly will provide training which will benefit local residents and their parish councils and meetings.

Conclusions / Summary

- The limited number of responses received makes it difficult for the Standards Committee to make an informed decision on what would be best for all South Cambridgeshire parish councils and meetings. Based on the information received, there is a slight preference for a Tuesday morning training session and just over half of the respondents were willing to pay a fee of £20 per delegate.
- Thirty-one parish councils and meetings are scheduled for elections in May 2007. Whilst delegates may attend whichever training session is most convenient for them, having one session after the elections will allow any newly-elected members the opportunity to receive training as soon as possible after their election. It is also hoped that the clerks and chairmen (or other delegates) who attend the training will cascade the information to the other new, continuing or returning members of their parish councils and meetings.

Recommendations

- To schedule two training sessions at a cost of £20 per delegate: on a Tuesday morning and on one other time after the May elections and to invite all parish councils and meetings to confirm attendance and nominate delegates by a set deadline.

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

Training Questionnaire sent to Parish Councils and Parish Meetings
Responses from Parish Councils and Parish Meetings
Report to Standards Committee, 8 August 2006

Contact Officer: Holly Adams – Democratic Services Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713030