

Part of the remit of the Civic Affairs Committee is to provide assistance to district and parish councillors by ensuring that all councillors have access to training in all aspects of the member Code of Conduct, that this training is actively promoted, and that members are aware of the standards expected from local councillors under the Code.

The district council and most parish councils have adopted new codes of conduct along with new procedures for administering a complaints system. Guidance has already been issued via briefing notes, newsletters, briefing sessions and individual advice via email. Given the potential for criminal sanctions if a councillor fails to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest in the correct way it is considered that training is necessary in order to avoid complaints and to save the time and resources that need to be committed to investigations and hearings.

There are three areas of training in the Committee's remit:

- 1) District Council Member Training
- 2) Parish Councillor training
- 3) Standards Committee Member Training

Training for District Councillors

At the last meeting members considered whether an external trainer should be used to provide code of conduct training for district councillors. A quote has now been obtained from Peter Keith-Lucas at Bevan Brittan solicitors, probably the foremost trainer in this area. Mr Keith-Lucas provided code of conduct training at SCDC in 2007 for all members which was well received at the time. He has quoted £2,500 plus VAT for a training session. Members had previously expressed concern at the cost of an external trainer and both Huntingdonshire District Council and now Braintree District Council have expressed an interest in sharing the costs of an external trainer. If the cost was split three ways there would be a cost of £830 & VAT to SCDC. The Committee is asked to consider if it wishes to proceed with this training on this basis.

Training for Parish Councillors

The Monitoring Officer has been working with colleagues from across the council as part of an Action Learning Set from the Leadership Development Programme on "Working with parish councils". This cross-departmental group is looking at how we currently communicate with parish councils and identify where there is scope for improvement. This includes the current provision of training/parish forum events and what the level of interest is in various topics, as well as what the best timings for maximum attendance levels by parishes would be. A consultation session is to be held in January with a group of parish clerks and parish councillors when their views will be sought. Responses received will inform how a large scale parish training event (possibly annual) will be organised, which will cover areas such as parish planning powers and the planning process alongside code of conduct training.

Training for Civic Affairs Committee on hearings

The Committee decided at its last meeting that training would be held prior to any hearing that was necessary.