

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Standards Committee
Date:	10 October 2023
Subject:	Member Induction and Member Development Working Group
Chief Officer:	Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer
Contact Officers:	Alexander Polak, Head of Governance & Scrutiny, Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	Appendix A – Induction Programme 2023 as delivered

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report:

- Is an update of the report published for an inquorate meeting of the Standards Committee in April 2023
- Provides information about the 2023 Member Induction Programme (now complete)
- Seeks members' endorsement of the principles for an ongoing member development programme
- Recommends members convene a small 'Member Development Working Group,' to be consulted on the ongoing development of the Member Development Programme throughout the rest of the year (which will be built using Members' feedback from the October 2023 Member Survey).

Recommendations:

- 1. That the committee provide feedback on the induction programme for new councillors in 2023;**
- 2. That the principles for member development set out in section 3 are endorsed for the ongoing member development programme; and**
- 3. That the committee endorses the creation of a small, informal 'Member Development Working Group' of councillors and officers to advise the Monitoring Officer on member development issues throughout the year.**

Reasons for recommendations:

- To provide Councillors with the key skills, tools, knowledge and confidence to enable them to successfully navigate their roles and effectively discharge their council responsibilities.
- To demonstrate progress against the recommendations in the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's *Scrutiny Improvement Review*, including that we have begun to upskill and develop councillors' capacity and capability to take on and respond to the current significant challenges faced by the Council.
- To ensure that the Council complies with its duty to implement the Directions of the Secretary of State to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of democratic governance and scrutiny.

Commissioner Review

"Commissioners strongly support the Council having a robust Member development plan where Members take advantage of training offered and the training is of a quality that is valued by Members. A key indicator of this is feedback from training delegates and Commissioners therefore support any recommendation that encourages feedback."

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The induction programme which was delivered by Slough Borough Council for its incoming councillors is set out in Appendix A. It gave specific attention given to training of Scrutiny Members in light of the government direction on that topic.
- 2.2 The Member development plan was originally published on the agenda for an April 2023 meeting of the Standards Committee which was not quorate, and therefore the plan was not formally agreed. A small working group of councillors from that committee was convened to provide input into the induction programme, but it would now be useful to have any feedback (and formal endorsement for renewing that working group) from the Standards Committee.
- 2.3 The Member Development Plan itself takes the form of a series of principles for the way in which member induction and development will be done during the current year, and a detailed plan for induction. It was designed to focus on key skills and knowledge so that first-time Councillors could hit the ground running and to enable returning Councillors to build on their existing knowledge and skills base. This focus on new councillors and scrutiny was prescient since, in the event, 22 of the 42 councillors elected in May 2023 were new to the council. Nevertheless the plan was adapted significantly from what was originally proposed, and was supported by a lot of personalised support for individual councillors in key roles, in light of the election result and change in administration.
- 2.4 The plan was designed to provide a framework for, and to demonstrate our commitment to, the continued professional development of Councillors. In order to meet the council's improvement goals it must provide sufficient ongoing development opportunities for its decision-makers, to steadily improve their skills, knowledge and behaviours.

- 2.5 The plan is closely aligned to the requirements highlighted in the CFGS Scrutiny Review, the Directions from the Secretary of State (specifically to ensure that councillors make evidence-based decisions, and are mindful of the duty of best value), and the Council's strategic priorities, its recovery plan and vision.
- 2.6 The plan envisaged that the bulk of training would be provided in-house, with a mixture of online and in-person sessions, with accessibility enabled by modern technology such as recording sessions on Teams. Some sessions would be facilitated by external providers and councillors would also be encouraged through various other means to gain outside experience of 'what good looks like'.
- 2.7 The core pieces of the induction programme – as delivered - are presented in Appendix A, and a new Member Development Working Group is proposed. This group would work with the Monitoring Officer to firm up the detailed schedule of member development for the rest of the year and beyond, once we have Members' feedback from the forthcoming October 2023 edition of the Member Survey.

3 Member Development Plan 2023/24

- 3.1 This Plan is as originally presented in April 2023, with updates in light of developments since that date.
- 3.2 The following items comprise the principles and practices which will ensure the success and continual improvement of the Member development offer during 2023/24:

Structure and prioritisation of development offer

- 3.3 The intention overall is to prioritise as follows:
1. Mandatory courses first which comprise a minimum baseline of compliance with legal and constitutional requirements (eg with regard to Member Code of Conduct, declarations of interest, information governance, and mandatory Planning/Licensing training)
 2. Skills next (ie *how* to be an effective councillor)
 3. Subject matter knowledge, primarily delivered at moments when it is relevant and can be applied eg subject briefings in advance of decisions on those topics.
- 3.4 The induction programme set out at Appendix A followed this pattern and is split into these sections for clarity. With induction behind us, the balance is expected to shift more towards 'subject matter knowledge' while maintaining steady progress on member skills.

Scrutiny Training

- 3.5 The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), with funding assistance by the Local Government Association, have delivered a programme of Scrutiny development work specially for Slough Borough Council, in light of the findings in their review of SBC's scrutiny arrangements and the developments in the service since. Their proposal was submitted in July 2022 and the council delivered it in full for the new cohort for Scrutiny members commencing immediately after the election. This was a critical thread in the Council's Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan. It included facilitated support for the development of the Scrutiny Work

Programme as well as bespoke training for the scrutiny committee, its chair, the cabinet and officers.

- 3.6 Full details of the CfGS proposal can be found at [Appendix B to the report published in April 2023](#) and is described in Appendix A as delivered.

Other Committee-specific training

- 3.7 Where possible, committee-specific training (such as that for planning and licencing) took place on the evening of their first scheduled meeting, as is custom and practice at SBC.
- 3.8 Further training and development is expected to take place on at least an annual basis, and for key committees which are currently subject to considerable corporate focus (such as Scrutiny and Audit) on a more frequent basis through the system of regular pre-meetings.

External expertise, including visits and mentoring

- 3.9 In the past members have had some concerns about training delivered by third parties, both because it costs money and because training delivered in this way has sometimes been felt to lack sufficient awareness of Slough Borough Council's local context, or the lived experience of SBC's councillors.
- 3.10 Efforts must be made to mitigate this effect however it is important to recognise the value of input from outside sources. In particular, the council's commissioners have repeatedly expressed that they felt there would be a benefit for SBC Councillors of visiting other authorities and meeting councillors from other authorities in order to develop a stronger sense of 'what good looks like'.
- 3.11 A programme of visits to other authorities is proposed a part of the ongoing development programme, with an emphasis on committee Chairs gaining contacts and experience with their opposite numbers at other authorities.
- 3.12 The LGA has offered to assist the Council with identifying suitable councils to visit. Officers are currently in the process of arranging experiences for councillors linked to other local authorities and to the House of Commons, to build on the induction programme.
- 3.13 During the previous administration, the LGA provided a structured mentoring service to Members with key roles and this has been reconstructed for the new administration too, at great effort. The LGA provide hand-picked mentors for SBC councillors who are experienced councillors from other authorities around the country. These mentors are professional and are paid for their time, and the LGA has funded this work. Anecdotal feedback from the members involved has generally been very positive.
- 3.14 Most cabinet members in the new administration have now accepted a Mentor and begun working with them, as have those committee chairs covered by the scheme.

Remote working and creating a video library

- 3.15 In light of the significant proportion of members of Slough Borough Council who work full time and/or have caring responsibilities it is considered beneficial to

conduct a significant proportion of traditional development and training sessions online rather than in-person. This also enables recording of these sessions via MS Teams. A library of member development videos can then be built, hosted by Democratic Services on SharePoint, for members to review in their own time at a later date. This is intended to increase the overall uptake of learning and development opportunities and allows members to access content at a time which suits them rather than having to attend a specific training session.

- 3.16 However there will remain an important role for face-to-face sessions when different learning styles are being employed, for example coaching, mentoring, whole-committee workshops and applied learning in-committee will all benefit from being conducted in-person where possible. In practice, a fair proportion of member development sessions in 2023 have been in-person because this was felt to be beneficial when so many councillors are brand new. Members views are sought going forward via the proposed working group.

Members' Handbook 2023

- 3.17 The induction programme was supplemented by the Members' Handbook, which is designed to be a resource for Members throughout their term of office. It contains a wide range of useful and practical information regarding their roles and responsibilities, how the Council operates, its vision and priorities and support available for Members.

Senior Officer attendance

- 3.18 There is an expectation that subject-matter training will be delivered and/or attended by senior officers so that there is accountability and appropriately strategic engagement with Members. Senior officer buy-in to member development has been good during the 2023 induction programme.

Measuring and Monitoring Satisfaction

- 3.19 In the past, response rates from Members to post-course surveys have been extremely low which makes it difficult to assess the success of the training provided. Regrettably, this pattern has continued since the election – only 5 responses to satisfaction surveys have been received across the entire induction programme.
- 3.20 Members' views are welcome on how to improve our visibility of member satisfaction with training sessions. In the meantime the Member Survey has been used as a means to assess overall satisfaction with member development and the next iteration of that survey is due in October 2023, giving us a better view of member satisfaction with the induction programme. The previous council's baseline impressions can be found in the member survey item elsewhere on today's agenda.

Member Development Charter

- 3.21 Some authorities (13 in the South East) have [obtained 'charter status'](#) for Member Development. This is essentially a system which recognises local authorities which have been formally assessed to have met a set of criteria defined by the Local Government Association. The criteria relate to the quality of member development offered by the authority. In our region the assessment and associated support is carried out by South East Employers. There is a cost of about £3,000 associated with gaining charter status and a significant investment of officer and member time

is required. For example, one criterion has been that all members should have a personal development plan and regular 1:1 meetings with a lead officer to assess progress against that plan.

- 3.22 While charter plus would be a worthy goal for SBC, it is not considered that resources are available to support the required level of investment in 2023/24. However, members should keep an eye on the possibility that SBC could aim for charter status by the end of the new four-year administration, if the required resources can be identified and the cost justified.

Making courses 'mandatory' and differentiating between new and experienced Members

- 3.23 Members are not employees and the Council has no sanctions it can apply to force Members to undertake training, except where some specific committees constitutionally require their Members to undertake training in order to sit on a committee. This is a nationally recognised issue when it comes to Member development. Nevertheless, a strong expectation can be set by Group Leaders who are in a position to apply sanctions within their Groups as they see fit.

- 3.24 In all invitations and communications relating to the induction programme, the following terms were used in order to best encourage take-up of training by the most relevant councillors:

- **Mandatory** – failure to attend would not be in compliance with the requirements on members set out in the constitution and/or prevent you from sitting on a specific committee
- **Essential** – All Members are expected by their own Group Leaders to attend
- **Encouraged** – All Members would benefit from attending and it will be relevant to all Members
- **Welcome** – All Members would benefit from attending, but it may be less relevant for some.

Scheduling

- 3.25 It is intended that online working and recording of member development sessions will enable the councillors to access learning and development courses regardless of the time of day they are held. However, in general it is considered best to hold online sessions around the end of the working day but before evening meetings (eg between 17:00-18:00) or to hold in-person sessions immediately before formal meetings (17:30-18:20). Democratic Services will continue to be responsible for scheduling member development sessions in order to minimise the frequency of clashes with the formal meeting calendar.

Format

- 3.26 There is an expectation that presenters will provide an active learning environment with varying styles of learning and presentation and opportunities for discussion. This will continue to be assessed through Member feedback.

Attendance

- 3.27 Members' attendance will be recorded as per any other Member meeting. The Member Survey report elsewhere on today's agenda gives some insight into

Members' reasons for not attending sessions, however the greatest response from councillors was that nothing prevents them. The annual production of the Member development plan should continue to report to Members on attendance statistics in a generalised fashion to inform any potential actions as necessary if attendance or compliance is low. This will be due at the next 6-monthly meeting of the Standards Committee in April.

LGA resources – e-learning and workbooks

3.28 Slough Borough Council is a Member of the Local Government Association. This Membership includes access for Slough's Members to a number of e-learning courses and workbooks. The LGA is always releasing new content and courses, and Democratic Services stays abreast of this content and includes it in the regular Member Newsletter every Friday.

3.29 Self-service is a key tenet of the Council's current transformation programme. Councillors have been guided to access the following e-learning courses via self-registration with the LGA. We anticipate that take-up so far will be low. After a new round of comms on this topic, data about completion rates will be monitored and reported to Group Leaders:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Holding council meetings online
- Facilitation and conflict resolution
- Effective ward Councillor
- Scrutiny
- Influencing skills
- Local government finance
- Supporting mentally healthier communities

3.30 Councillors have been referred to the many LGA workbooks available for them to work through in their own time, through a scheduled series of articles in the Members' Newsletter over the period of the council, including:

- Acting on climate change
- Being an effective ward Councillor
- Bribery and fraud prevention
- Chaining skills
- Community leadership
- Community safety
- Councillor/officer relations
- Engaging young people
- Handling casework
- Health and safety in the council
- Health in All Policies and COVID-19
- Local government finance
- Neighbourhood & community engagement
- Neighbourhood planning - ward Councillors
- New Councillors
- Scrutiny of finance
- Supporting residents with complex issues

Member Survey

- 3.31 A survey of members was carried out and the results can be found elsewhere on today's agenda. This includes important data about members' satisfaction with member development and a significant amount of valuable free-text comments providing suggestions for future training. To avoid duplication of paperwork those comments are not reproduced in this report but they can be found elsewhere on today's agenda.
- 3.32 The survey results were taken into account by officers in the development of the induction programme. In addition a Member Development Working Group assisted officers with reviewing members' feedback in order to inform the remainder of the ongoing Member development schedule.

Resources for delivery of the Member Development Plan

- 3.33 Given the financial climate in which the council finds itself, Member Development will need to be delivered within existing resources and it should be noted that the induction programme was ambitious given the context. Accordingly, co-operation by the whole council will be necessary in order to deliver a year-round programme of learning for Members.

Parish Councils

- 3.34 The Monitoring Officer has previously written to the Clerks of the 3 parishes on the Borough, offering assistance in relation to any matters arising under the Parish Council's Code of Conduct or any other related issues, but this offer has not been taken up, to date. The Monitoring Officer has again written to the Clerks specifically asking if he can assist with any training of Parish Councillors on the Code of Conduct and asking for assurance as to what training has been given in relation to the Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer will update members at the meeting of any response.

4. Implications of the Recommendation

4.1 Financial implications

While a modest budget is available for individual members to attend external training or to bring in external trainers during the year, this report does not commit members to any specific spend. This budget is managed and administered by Democratic Services and the Democratic Services Manager has the authority to determine payment from this for external providers of any courses mentioned in this report, without the need for a councillor decision.

4.2 *Legal implications*

None, other than as referred to in the report.

4.3 *Risk management implications*

None, other than as referred to in the report.

4.4 Environmental implications

None

4.5 Equality implications

None

5. Background Papers

None

Appendix A – Key aspects of Member Induction Schedule 2023

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION						
Name of training	All Members	First-time Members	All recently elected Members	Specific Members	Date	Delivery
PRE-INDUCTION						
Election					Thurs 4 May	
Count					Friday 5 May	
At count: Sign acceptance of office Sign IT governance form Provide contact details Initial photograph taken			Mandatory		Friday 5 May	In person
At count: All members issued with welcome pack and declarations of Interest forms					Friday 5 May	In person
Group meetings and administration time					w/c 8 May w/c 15 May	
INDUCTION – WELCOME and bitesize first modules.						
New Members Welcome Evening	Essential	Essential	Essential		Thurs 11 May 18:00-19:30	In person
CLT welcome and corporate overview (including financial position and governance responsibilities)						
Induction programme overview						
Sign acceptance of office (any not complete at election count)			Mandatory		Appointments with individual new Members	In person

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION						
Name of training	All Members	First-time Members	All recently elected Members	Specific Members	Date	Delivery
					as per availability 11-14 May	
Distribute IT equipment and IT training support for O365 etc		Essential			Appointments with IT ASAP after election - TBC	In person
All new Members to be allocated 'buddies' from existing cohort in their party – organised by Group Leaders						
INDUCTION - SKILLS						
Pre-AGM briefing in council chamber for all new Councillors	Welcome	Essential	Welcome		18 May 17:30 prior to the Annual Meeting (up to 60 minutes long)	In person
Pre-meeting before each committee meets for the first time *Key procedure rules and practical tips eg speaking through the Chair etc * Purpose of committee, ways of working, importance of reading reports, tips for reading reports				Essential for all members of the relevant committee	Prior to each committee	In person
Induction Workshop 1 - 1. Code of Conduct and Member Officer Protocol 2. Improvement and Recovery (Non - Finance) 3. Governance & Decision-Making	Essential	Essential	Essential		8th June 2023	In person
Induction Workshop 2 1.Safeguarding Adults	Essential	Essential	Essential		14th June 2023	In person

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION						
Name of training	All Members	First-time Members	All recently elected Members	Specific Members	Date	Delivery
				Governance Cttee Members		
O&S training – first session	Encouraged	Essential	Encouraged	Essential: O&S Members	30 May 6:30pm	In person
Further O&S training sessions: 1:1 support for Chair and Vice Chair of CISC – 13 June Planning an Effective Scrutiny Work Programme – 4 July Cabinet-only scrutiny training – 7 September Extended CLT (officers) training Budget/finance scrutiny (cabinet and scrutiny) – 6 September				Essential: O&S Members, Cabinet, Officers as appropriate	June-September	Mixture of in person and online
Chairing skills	Welcome	Welcome	Welcome	Essential: All Chairs and Vice Chairs	Two sessions in w/c 22 May	online
IT drop-in sessions	Welcome	Encouraged	Welcome		At each Council meeting	Mixture of in person and online
Visits to other local authorities, for Chairs to meet their opposite numbers and for committee members to view other committees in action	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged		Year-round	Mixture of in person and online

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION						
Name of training	All Members	First-time Members	All recently elected Members	Specific Members	Date	Delivery
First Aid	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged		TBC	In person
MEMBER DEVELOPMENT - KNOWLEDGE						
Directorate priorities – ‘An evening with...’ each Exec Director. Exec Directors to consider use of site visit opportunities.	Welcome	Encouraged	Welcome		TBC	Online
Cabinet-focused development (designed with new cabinet – have had a series of away-days)				Essential: Cabinet Members	Spread across the year	TBC
Councillors will be referred to the 28 Local Government Association workbooks available for them to work through in their own time including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting on climate change • Being an effective ward Councillor • Bribery and fraud prevention • Chairing skills • Community leadership • Community safety • Councillor/officer relations • Engaging young people • Handling casework • Health and safety in the council • Health in All Policies and COVID-19 	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged		In Members’ own time	N/A

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

Name of training	All Members	First-time Members	All recently elected Members	Specific Members	Date	Delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local government finance• Neighbourhood & community engagement• Neighbourhood planning - ward Councillors• New Councillors• Scrutiny of finance• Supporting residents with complex issues						

