

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 4TH MARCH 2008

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Report of the: Monitoring Officer

Status: For consideration

Executive Summary: The Committee is advised of the training that has been taking place by way of the training workshops and the training that is envisaged for the future. Members of the Committee are requested to consider taking part in a three hour training exercise developed by the Standards Board for England to help them develop their ability to carry out the new assessment process due to be implemented in April 2008 (Appendix 2).

This report supports the Key Aim of effective management of Council resources

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Loney

Head of Service Head of Legal and Committee Services – Christine Nuttall

Recommendation: It be RESOLVED that Members consider the report and make arrangements to take part in a three hour Standards Board for England training session on the new local assessment process.

Background

- 1 The Monitoring Officer is responsible through the Standards Committee for the provision of training to Councillors within the District and the Parish/Town Councils.

Introduction

- 2 The Monitoring Officer has from 28th November 2008 embarked upon an extensive training programme with weekly training workshops taking place for Members of the District Council and Clerks of the Town and Parish Councils.
- 3 The training workshops are continuing and visits are planned to be made to a number of Parish and Town Councils taking in not only Clerks but the training of Members belonging to such Parish and Town Councils.
- 4 The Monitoring Officer has been helped in such training by various Members of the Standards Committee.
- 5 The number of Members and Clerks who have attended the workshop are as follows:

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Attendance figures as at 18th February 2008

District Councillors

Number of Councillors	Councillors Attended	Councillors Remaining
54	22	32

Parish/Town Councils

Number of Councils	Councils Attended	Councils Still to Attend
29	11	18

Feed Back

- 6 The feed back from the training workshops has been encouraging and monitoring reports are enclosed at Appendix 1 with names redacted.
- 7 The Monitoring Officer continues to adopt an open door policy of proactively helping Members with any ethical problems and Members, Town/Parish Clerks and Officers of the Council are encouraged to contact the Monitoring Officer earlier rather than later if they are anticipating or experiencing a problem.

The Future

- 8 In respect of the new local assessment process that will be introduced in April 2008 there will be a duty on the Monitoring Officer through the Standards Committee to inform the public of the new arrangements.
- 9 In the training workshops that are currently taking place those that attend are provided with a training manual and the new local assessment process is explained in detail along with the provisions of the Code of Conduct.
- 10 The Monitoring Officer together with the Chairman of the Standards Committee visited Edenbridge Forum on the 4th February 2008 to give guidance on the requirements of the Code of Conduct and the new local assessment process. Visits to the other Forums around the District are planned.
- 11 The Standards Board for England (the Board) are planning to produce template notices for publicising the authority's Code of Conduct complaint process.

Training of Standard Committee Members on the New Filtering Process

- 12 The Board has produced a training exercise for Standards Committees which is set out at Appendix 2. The intention of the training exercise is to help Standards Committees develop their ability to assess new complaints. The

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task is to decide from amongst 12 cases which cases should be referred for further action. The Committee will need to provide reasons for those which are not referred.

- 13 It is expected that the exercise should take no more than half a day or an evening, in other words, a three hour mock session for this Committee.
- 14 Members of the Committee are asked to consider undertaking the training session with possible dates being discussed.
- 15 On the 4th March 2008 the Monitoring Officer and the Vice Chairman of this Committee are due to attend a training session entitled “Code of Conduct and the Local First Sieve”. Information from this training session can be cascaded to other Members of the Committee and will no doubt help when the Board’s training exercise takes place.

Options

- 15 Members of the Committee are thanked for helping to deliver training via the training workshops currently taking place. The Monitoring Officer greatly appreciates such help which has proved invaluable.
- 16 Members are advised to consider taking part in a three hour training session devised by the Board to help enable this Committee undertake the requirements of the new assessment process.

Key Implications

Financial

- 17 Training sessions have been accommodated within the Council’s existing budgets.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

- 18 Training for Members in respect of the Code of Conduct and generally in respect of the ethical framework is an essential part of the Standards Committee’s responsibilities as set out in the Constitution.
- 19 There will soon be a requirement for the Monitoring Officer through the Standards Committee to educate the public on the new assessment process.

Resource (non-financial)

- 20 Training is essential to enable a smooth transition to the new locally based assessment process. Training should ensure a speedy and accurate assessment to take place thus allowing the system to work in a resource efficient way.

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Value For Money

- 21 Training is essential to help reduce the number of Code of Conduct Complaints. In addition the training is vitally important so that the new assessment process can be undertaken in a confident and robust fashion. No additional resources have been ascribed to the new process although the Board itself is saving money in devolving power locally. Training may ensure that the new processes can be undertaken on a cost neutral basis.

Equality

- 22 Training on the Code of Conduct and the new assessment process is essential in giving Members and the Public equal access to the new locally based system. It should also give Members and the Public alike confidence in the new processes with no one being disadvantaged either in their ability to pursue an allegation or in defending themselves against an allegation.

Conclusions

- 23 Training is essential to enable Members to acquire the key competencies to comply with the Code of Conduct and the changes that will be taking place with the new assessment process. Members should benefit from the training that is on offer.

Risk Assessment Statement

- 24 Training is essential to avoid flawed judgements being made by Members when carrying out the new local assessment process. In addition training will avoid procedural errors.
- 25 To carry out the new local assessment process Members of the Committee will also need to have a detailed knowledge of the Code of Conduct which training can help to achieve.
- 26 Without the necessary training there is a greater risk that a decision may be made that is subject to a successful judicial review which may have adverse cost consequences for the Council as well as the Council suffering a loss of reputation and standing.

Sources of Information: Training material produced by the Board

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