

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 23 APRIL 2009****TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Report of the: Monitoring Officer

Status: For consideration

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**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.

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**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

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**Recommendation:** It be RESOLVED that Members consider the report .

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**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 Standards Committee has since April 2008 continued with an extensive training programme with training workshops taking place for Members of the District Council, Members and Clerks of the Town and Parish Councils as well as specific groups of Officers within the Council.
- 3 The training has been undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and various Members of the Standards Committee.
- 4 The sessions for 2008/09 have concentrated on training Parish Members and Clerks. Those trained to date are as follows with further training sessions planned:

Parishes attending Code of Conduct Workshops since April 2008

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
Ash-cum-Ridley	9 (including Clerk)
Cowden	6 (training at Cowden)
Dunton Green	2 (including Clerk)

Parishes attending Code of Conduct Workshops since April 2008

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
Edenbridge	(Cllrs Davison, Mrs Davison and Scoley attended as SDC members)
Eynsford	1 (the Clerk)
Halstead	7
Hever	6
Hextable	10
Kemsing	2
Sevenoaks Town	1
Shoreham	1 (the Clerk)
Sundridge-Ide Hill	1
Swanley	10 (including Town Clerk and Assistant Clerk)
West Kingsdown	1

Parishes attending Code of Conduct Workshops prior April 2008

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
Ash-cum-Ridley	
Brasted	1 (the Clerk)
Chiddingstone	1 (the Clerk)
Dunton Green	2
Halstead	2 (Cllr Grint as SDC member)
Hartley	3
Horton Kirby	1 (the Clerk)
Kemsing	3
Knockholt	4
Leigh	1 (the Clerk)
Otford	6
Riverhead	2 (including Clerk)
Sevenoaks Weald	1 (the Clerk)
Shoreham	1
Sundridge Ide Hill	4

Parishes attending Code of Conduct Workshops prior April 2008

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
Swanley with Hextable	3 (including Assistant Clerk)
Westerham	4 (including Clerk)
West Kingsdown	2 (Cllrs Bosley and Mrs Bosley as SDC members)

<u>Parishes that have never attended</u>	
Chevening	NIL
Crockenhill	NIL (Cllr Dibsdall as SDC Member)
Farningham	NIL (Cllr McGarvey as SDC Member)
Fawkham	NIL (Cllr Mrs Parkin as SDC Member)
Penshurst	NIL
Seal	NIL

**Feed Back**

- 5 The feed back from the training workshops has been encouraging and monitoring reports are enclosed at Appendix 1 with names redacted.
- 6 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.

**Training and Conciliation of Hextable Parish Council and Swanley Town Council**

- 7 Following a Direction dated 24<sup>th</sup> January 2008 received from the Standards Board the England (the Board) a Code of Conduct and Conciliation Workshop took place for Hextable Parish Council on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2008. On the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2009 a similar session took place for Swanley Town Council. The training and conciliation was undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Chair of the Standards Committee.
- 8 A copy of the report to the Board following the training and conciliation together with the Board's reply is attached as an Appendix 2 to this report.

**Training for Standards Committee Members on the Assessment Sub Committee and Review Sub Committee Process**

- 9 All Members of the Standards Committee have been trained on how to assess complaints made against Members and also how to review such complaints.
- 10 Three sessions took place lasting half a day. The training formed practical exercises whereby the task was to decide from amongst 12 cases which should be referred for further action which could include investigation. Members had to provide reasons for not referring for investigation.

**The Future**

- 11 In the training workshops that are 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.
- 12 Those Parish and Town Councils who have never attended training on the Code of Conduct need to be encouraged to attend training and efforts will be made to approach such Councils in order that they may sign up for training.
- 13 Members of the public also need training on the Code of Conduct and Ethical Agenda. Publicity takes place via our website page entitled “Code of Conduct and complaints against councillors. Public notices have been given setting out the details of the new complaints process. Our “In-Shape” publication has also informed residents and businesses about the new procedures and how to make a complaint.
- 14 Training on the Code of Conduct and new assessment procedures has also been given to Independent Members from another authority and has been well received.

**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.

**Key Implications**

Financial

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

Impact on and Outcomes for the Community

- 17 This report sets out the training that has taken place on the Code of Conduct and the new assessment process for Member Complaints. Complaints are now filtered via the Assessment Sub Committee and Review Sub Committee and the system appears to be working well for the Community of Sevenoaks District.

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.

Resource (non-financial)

- 19 Training has been essential in enabling a smooth transition to the new locally based assessment process. Training ensures a speedy and accurate assessment to take place thus allowing the system to work in a resource efficient manner.

Value For Money

- 20 Training is essential to help reduce the number of Member Complaints. In addition 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 has saved money in devolving power locally. Training internally has ensured that the new processes have been undertaken on a cost neutral basis.

Equality

- 21 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 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.

Sustainability Checklist

- 22 The training that has taken place in relation to the Code of Conduct and the new assessment process should provide the Members and the public with confidence that robust systems are in place for enabling high ethical standards across the district.

**Conclusions**

- 23 Training is essential to enable Members to acquire the key competencies to comply with the Code of Conduct and the changes that have taken 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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