



**Governance & Audit
Committee**

Tuesday, 16 June 2020

Subject: Review of Member Development

Report by:

Monitoring Officer

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To present the proposals for the online training options and the proposed By-Election Induction Programme template.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1) That Members approve the introduction of online training, via Learning Pool, as an additional development tool for Councillors; and**
- 2) That the By-Election Induction Programme template be agreed.**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: N/A

Financial: FIN/199/20/SL

Learning Pool is already in use for Officers and therefore should not incur any additional cost to the council.

It is proposed that online courses will, on the whole, be in addition to the mandatory (committee-specific) face-to-face training and therefore cost-saving opportunities are minimal. It is not anticipated that the introduction of online training for Councillors will have any impact on the current Member Development budgets, however there may be some cost savings in terms of Officer time and reduced travel expenses for Members.

Depending on the success of online training, there may be the need for an increased budget in the future to focus on developing further opportunities online with a view to using it as the primary training provision.

The adoption of the By-Election Induction Programme template will incur no additional costs and any necessary 'as and when' expenditure (for example the Welcome Pack) will be met from within existing budgets.

Staffing: Any staffing requirements for training events or development opportunities will be met within existing staff numbers and there are no additional duties identified outside of existing job roles.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: It is anticipated that the introduction of online training options will offer Members a wider choice of learning opportunities to better suit their individual needs. It is recognised that there are different learning preferences and abilities and we intend to better cater for such difference by offering alternative methods of delivery.

Data Protection Implications: N/A

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: Opportunity to reduce the necessity for travel to attend Member training events

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations: N/A

Health Implications: N/A

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Risk Assessment:

N/A

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

X

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

X

IMPACT OF COVID 19

This report was prepared prior to the global pandemic and was due to be heard at the April meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee. Initially, after the introduction of stringent measures to reduce the spread of the virus, it was not considered feasible to roll out a new form of training at a time when Officers could not provide the standard level of support and assistance through the proposed workshops and 1-2-1 sessions. With elements of 'lockdown' now being eased, this concern may have been alleviated.

With regards to the By-Election Induction Programme, the pandemic has put a halt to elections until May 2021. Therefore, there is not the same level of urgency to have this template programme in place, however, it is unlikely to change and therefore could be agreed at any point prior to elections taking place.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 West Lindsey District Council has long been committed to the ongoing development of its Members. It is written in the Constitution that "Councillors will have training and development opportunities to support them in carrying out their duties and will be expected to attend those that are relevant to any role they carry out within the Council" (Part II, Article 2, paragraph 2.6 Member Development).
- 1.2 The Member Development Group was set up in 2018 with the aim of increasing Councillor involvement with the development programme. The initial focus was the 2019 Induction Programme but the group has since moved on to other areas of development.
- 1.3 There have been two main workstreams since May 2019. The first being to consider the introduction of online training options for Councillors, to assist with ease of undertaking varied development opportunities by providing alternative methods of delivery; the second being to finalise a comprehensive induction programme for those joining the council through a by-election.
- 1.4 This report seeks to complete these two areas of work. Should both aspects be approved by the Governance and Audit Committee, roll out will be effective from August 2020 and the Member Development Group will propose their new priorities for agreement in the next Member Development Annual Report.

2 Alternative Methods of Delivery – Online Training

- 2.1 In September 2019, the Governance and Audit Committee approved the priorities as identified by the Member Development Group, including testing online training options.

- 2.2 At their meeting in November, the group were joined by the Senior Human Resources and Organisational Development Officer who demonstrated Learning Pool, the online system currently used by council Officers for online courses. Members of the group agreed to trial Learning Pool for Councillors with a view to recommending full roll out, or otherwise, depending on the feedback of the group.
- 2.3 This trial period has now been concluded with collated feedback provided in the sections below. Of the eight Councillors signed up for the trial, four Councillors offered feedback.
- 2.4 Members were provided with a simple scoring option for six statements as well as the opportunity to share their additional thoughts and comments. The table below shows the statements and related responses.
- 2.5 1 = completely disagree
2 = somewhat disagree
3 = neither agree nor disagree
4 = somewhat agree
5 = completely agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I found Learning Pool straightforward to access / log-in			1	2	1
I found Learning Pool simple to navigate around		1	1	2	
Once the course had opened, it was easy to follow			2	2	
I had no difficulties using Learning Pool			2	1	1
I would use Learning Pool again			1	1	2
I would agree for Learning Pool to be rolled out to all Councillors as an alternative method of Member Development			1	2	1

- 2.6 Feedback, on the whole, was positive and supportive of the service being offered to all Councillors. In addition to these scored statements, those who offered additional thoughts and comments noted that the access to the course was somewhat 'clunky' with several screens to click through before the course opened. Once undertaking the course, there were some issues with progress not being saved and users being unable to re-access the course having coming out of it at an earlier point. These issues were rectified when the affected Councillors tried again at a later date, however, it has raised questions as to whether this sort of problem would be frequent and therefore deter Councillors from using the system. This will be addressed in partnership with the Senior Human Resources and Organisational Development Officer and Learning Pool to seek clarification.

2.7 Online Course Options

It is not anticipated that online learning would, as yet, replace the mandatory training elements for Councillors, such as Licensing & Regulatory, Planning or those Governance and Audit sessions such as Treasury Management. The benefit of online training would be best realised in the 'additional' courses Councillors could undertake. For example, sessions we currently provide on Data Protection, Safeguarding, Modern Day Slavery could all be accessed through Learning Pool. This could potentially offer some cost savings in terms of Officer time and Councillor expense claims. For those who wished to expand their own development, courses for personal growth or key skills (such as speed-reading or personal effectiveness) would also be available.

2.8 Option One: Adoption of Online Training - Suggested Roll-Out Process

Assuming Members agree to the adoption of online learning options for all Councillors, the Learning Pool system will be ready for roll-out from August 2020 (allowing time for Officers to complete registration for all Councillors on the system). Councillors will be provided with their log-in details, the link to the website as well as a step-by-step 'how to' guide. The Democratic Services team will be available to assist Councillors, however the specifics of this assistance will be determined according to the easing of 'lockdown' restrictions. The team will communicate all options to Members in due course. Following a suitable time period in order for Councillors to attempt some online training, there will be a survey distributed in order to gauge take-up and satisfaction levels.

2.8.1 Communication

Recent editions of the Members' Bulletin have included information around Member Development, such as upcoming events. This will continue to be the main form of communication with Members and will include details of any newly released online courses. The Democratic Services team will continue to offer assistance as and when necessary, especially when Members are strongly encouraged to complete an online course such as Data Protection.

2.8.2 Future Planning

For the foreseeable future, online learning will provide Councillors with an alternative way of completing training sessions in recommended areas of development, at a time and pace that suits them. The Democratic Services team will continue to monitor usage levels and Member satisfaction, with a view to expanding the online options over time to include some of the committee-specific mandatory subjects, should there be a proven need and appetite for this. There would likely be a budget implication as the council would need to commission bespoke courses and potentially offer face-to-face sessions as well as

the online content. This is an area of development that will remain on the service plan for the Democratic Services team.

2.9 Option Two: Decline Adoption of Online Training – Retain Status Quo

Should Members wish to continue with Member Development as it currently runs, there would be no further work undertaken to proceed with the roll-out of online options. The implications of not adopting online training would primarily affect the provision of non-mandatory courses, meaning sessions such as Safeguarding would continue to be provided face-to-face. A decision to decline adoption of online training at this time would not prevent options being revisited at a future time.

2.10 Option Three: Agreement in Principle for Online Training

The responses from our four trial Councillors would suggest that Learning Pool is a suitable option for all Members, whilst also acknowledging that differing levels of capability would require more, or less, intensive support. West Lindsey District Council already funds the use of Learning Pool for its Officers and so it would appear logical to use the same system for Councillors. If there were any questions raised about its suitability, there could be a third option between adoption or non-adoption. This would be to agree in principle to the introduction of online training options, subject to further research being undertaken, but for the roll-out to all Councillors to be postponed.

2.10.1 Implications of Further Research

Agreement in principle could be based on simple trouble-shooting of issues raised within Learning Pool or could go so far as to seek an alternative provider. Depending on the preference of Members, there could be significant financial implications involved and there would likely be a considerable time delay before roll-out of the preferred option to all Councillors. In addition to that, existing arrangements for Member development would need to continue in the interim, which would negate any possible savings of Councillor time and expenses and Officer time. Should Members choose option three, the Member Development Group would co-ordinate the process for further research and other options.

2.11 Recommendation

It is recommended that Members support option one of the report:

“that Members approve the introduction of online training, via Learning Pool, as an additional development tool for Councillors”.

3 By-Election Induction Programme Template

3.1 The need for a suitable template for a By-Election Induction Programme was identified in previous years after new Councillors highlighted areas where they felt they had not received a full induction. West Lindsey

District Council Constitution states ““In undertaking their role, Members are asked to commit to the Training and Development opportunities that are afforded to elected Members, including a full Induction Programme at the commencement of each term of office” (Part III, Member/Officer Relations Protocol, Section 2, paragraph 2.3). For those Councillors joining the council following an all-out election, the initial induction period covers all necessary aspects of the council’s work and whilst Officers endeavoured to provide this for those Councillors joining following a by-election, it was acknowledged that there were limitations.

- 3.2 Following the success of the May 2019 induction programme, the Member Development Group requested that this be used as the template for a By-Election Induction Programme. The aim was to take into consideration the individual needs of the newly elected Councillor and offer an induction programme to suit them. To this end, the By-Election Induction Programme (attached as Appendix 1) is a template model providing guidelines for the induction but allowing sufficient flexibility to meet the requirements of each new Councillor elected following a by-election.
- 3.3 This template was first used following the Torksey by-election in October 2019. The new Councillor was offered a variety of options in order to complete the Induction Programme at times to suit her. Officers then worked with those dates and times to ensure the new Councillor was able to complete key sessions in the same way as had been provided through the May 2019 induction.
- 3.4 Feedback gathered following this By-Election Induction Programme was positive and supported the flexible approach. It was acknowledged that it was an intense period of adjustment and learning but the face-to-face sessions enabled sufficient opportunity to ask questions and also to gain those introductions to key Officers as to know who to contact for further details in the future.
- 3.5 In recognition of the intense nature of these sessions, the template for by-election inductions has introduced a follow-up protocol to ensure newly elected Councillors have the opportunity to re-visit areas of the induction should they wish to. This will also be added to the Induction Programme following the next all-out elections in 2023.

3.6 Recommendation

It is recommended that

“the By-Election Induction Programme template be agreed”.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 Based on discussions within the Member Development Group, collated responses from the online learning trial sessions and personal feedback from the recent By-Election Induction Programme, it is believed that the

two proposed options (that is, to adopt Learning Pool and to agree the induction template) will appropriately meet the requirements of West Lindsey Councillors.

- 4.2 The approval of these two areas of development would complete the main focus of work for the Member Development Group for this municipal year and set the scene for further progress as we enter 2020/2021.
- 4.3 The Member Development Annual Report will be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee in September 2020 and will allow for further discussion for ongoing priorities.