



Horsham
District
Council

Induction of new councillors



Report of the Induction of newly-elected Councillors Working Group

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March 2015

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1. Introduction

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee, in September 2014, agreed to establish a working group to review the induction and training of newly-elected Horsham District Councillors.

This topic was suggested as a Scrutiny project by Councillor John Chidlow. He had reflected on his experience in 2011 as a newly-elected Councillor and felt that a review of the induction programme could be an opportunity to consider what, if any, changes might be beneficial. Those changes, if approved, could be delivered as part of the induction of newly-elected Councillors following the local elections to be held in May 2015.

2. Membership of the Working Group

Councillors: John Chidlow (Chairman), Roger Clarke, George Cockman, David Coldwell, Duncan England, Kate Rowbottom, Diana van der Klugt.

The Working Group welcomed the attendance of the following Councillors at some of its meetings: Roger Arthur, Leonard Crosbie, Brian Donnelly and Frances Haigh.

3. Objectives of the Review

The scope of the review is to examine the Council's training and information provided to newly-elected Councillors, particularly at the start of their four year term, and to any Councillor elected at mid-term or at other times, and also to consider the continuing training and development needs of new Councillors.

Terms of Reference

To consider and make recommendations to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on the following:

1. Interpretation of and interaction with planning regulations in practice, in particular in relation to the interpretation and implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. IT training and explanation of the available IT support for Councillors.
3. Training on how to access and make best use of the Horsham District Council website and intranet.

4. Training to inform Councillors about the Cabinet system and its management structure and functions, including an overview of each Cabinet Member's responsibilities, and providing Councillors with a staff organogram.
5. Informing newly-elected Councillors about the roles and responsibilities of the Council, its committees, Scrutiny working groups, and advisory groups.
6. Asking current Councillors what they thought was required in relation to the training for newly-elected Councillors and what priority should be given for each training requirement.
7. Asking senior Council officers what they thought was required in relation to the training for newly-elected Councillors and what priority should be given for each training requirement.

4. Summary of the Research Undertaken

The Working Group met on 3rd November 2014, 18th December 2014 and 15th January 2015.

Information was received from the following officers who attended the meetings:

Elaine Boud, Learning and Development Officer;
Paul Cummins, Head of Legal and Democratic Services; and
Robert Laban, Human Resource and Organisational Development Manager

Comments from the Senior Leadership Team were also received.

Details of previous induction programmes, findings from a survey of current Members, and relevant publications also informed the Working Group's discussions.

Previous induction programmes

The Working Group reviewed the induction and event programmes for newly-elected Councillors which had been delivered in 2011 and 2013.

Members of the Working Group felt there was a risk of information overload in the induction process and emphasised the need for a phased programme. Members recognised that there had to be priority training in key subject areas which could then be followed with further training at regular intervals.

The Working Group suggested that the induction training sessions should be made available to all Councillors and not only to those who would be elected to the Council for the first time.

Mentors

The Working Group noted the support provided by Officer mentors to new Councillors at previous inductions and Members welcomed confirmation that this would happen again. Officer mentors would be selected and trained in due course.

The Working Group suggested that the Officer mentors be asked to contact the newly-elected Councillor who they would be mentoring within one week of the local elections, and that they arrange to meet their Councillor at least once a month for a period of six months after the May 2015 elections. The political Group Leaders could be asked to monitor that those meetings had taken place and to ask the newly-elected Councillors if they felt they were receiving sufficient support from their Officer mentor.

The Working Group felt that Member mentors would be a useful addition to the support offered to newly-elected Councillors. The political Group Leaders have been informed of this suggestion and support it. For those wards, where appropriate, which are represented by more than one Councillor and when one existing Councillor is re-elected, that experienced Councillor could be asked to mentor the newly-elected Member.

The issue of mentoring Independent Members will be addressed.

The Working Group suggested that a checklist be prepared for Officer and Member mentors to detail the information they would be expected to provide to new Councillors.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) supports the idea of Member and Officer mentors. Member mentors could be selected in the first week after the May 2015 local elections and it is suggested that they liaise with the Officer mentors.

Training for Officer and Member mentors will be arranged.

Survey of Councillor Members

A recent survey of current Members was undertaken by the Democratic Services team to assess the services provided and support given to Members. The survey included questions about the induction programme and about the learning and development opportunities available to Members.

The responses that were received were almost equally split between those who felt the induction programme provided new Councillors with a good start to their work on the Council, and those Councillors who felt the opposite.

Similarly, the responses showed a split between those Members who feel the learning opportunities available to Councillors adequately meets their needs, and those who hold the opposite view.

Some of the Councillors who responded to the survey also commented that there should be a structured development programme, a phased induction, that Members should be informed about which officers could help on specific topics, that meetings with officers should be arranged, and that the more experienced Councillors should be involved in the induction process to provide a councillor's perspective.

Useful publications

The Working Group received the Local Government Association's (LGA) publication, *'The 21st Century guide for new Members'*, issued in May 2013, which outlines a typical induction programme. This Guide can be viewed via the following link to the LGA website:

http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=74d6d1e7-465a-4f21-8939-a495298eb306&groupId=10180

The Working Group also received the Local Government Association's publication *'Councillors' Guide for new Councillors 2014/15'* which provides useful guidance and information. It is suggested that this be included in any information pack provided to prospective candidates standing for local election. The Working Group recognised that newly-elected Councillors had differing levels of experience and knowledge. This LGA publication provided key information that a new councillor needed to know. It explores some of the main issues and challenges facing local government and includes useful hints and tips from experienced councillors. The Guide includes a section on induction and training and refers to the LGA's programmes for councillor development. This Guide can be viewed via the following link to the LGA website: http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/-/journal_content/56/10180/6202054/PUBLICATION

The Working Group received the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report, published in July 2014, titled *'Ethics in Practice: Promoting Ethical Standards in Public Life'*. The report examines ethics in induction, notes good practice, highlights areas where standards are at risk, and identifies where improvements can be made to embed ethical standards more effectively. Its conclusion is that induction is essential to ensure that public office holders are aware of the standards expected of them, and that ethical standards need to be included in the induction arrangements. The report can be viewed via this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethics-in-practice-promoting-ethical-standards-in-public-life>

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has agreed to provide early training on the Code of Conduct and ethical practice; training on wider ethical governance would be provided later in the induction programme.

Training Toolkit

The Working Group has suggested that some of the induction training could be videoed. Those Members who cannot attend the training sessions could receive the training videos via their iPADS or the intranet. There could be a questionnaire that Members will complete after watching the video to demonstrate an understanding of the subject matter of the training.

The Senior Leadership Team supported the idea of training sessions being filmed and made available to Members. The Chairman of the Working Group feels that such training videos should form part of a training toolkit and for use in refresher sessions but that they should not be an alternative to Councillors attending induction training.

The Working Group suggested that all Councillors should be encouraged to attend the Member Seminars, training sessions, and to make use of the offer of ICT training from the Training Officer.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT) comments

The SLT supports the Working Group's review and agrees that the induction training for newly-elected Councillors should give priority to communicating the most crucial information in the first few weeks, and then schedule the remaining training at regular intervals over a period six months.

Training for new Members on planning matters will be a priority task; the Director of Planning will provide the initial training materials and arrange subsequent training. The SLT has noted that induction training on the Council's email and IT systems is a high priority.

The SLT supports the suggestion that induction training sessions be filmed and made available to Members.

5. Chairman's Conclusions

The previous induction programmes are a sound basis on which to build in preparation for the induction programme for newly-elected Councillors that will take place in 2015.

The Working Group's suggestions and recommendations seek to enhance the induction programme and to propose changes to some of the methods of its delivery.

Any induction and training should take account of the different levels of experience that newly-elected Councillors may possess.

The Chairman is grateful to his fellow councillors for their assistance in conducting this review; and also thanks the Officers for their assistance and engagement.

6. Recommendations to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

To request that the induction programme for newly-elected Councillors include the following elements:

1. To adopt the suggested induction programme outlined in the Appendix to this report.
2. Officer mentors to be selected and trained to support newly-elected Councillors.
3. Member mentors to be nominated and trained to provide peer support to newly-elected Councillors.
4. To ask new Councillors about their personal experience and skills, and the areas of Council activity that they might wish to participate in, to assist Group Leaders in nominating new Councillors to relevant working groups and advisory groups.
5. To video induction training sessions to form part of a training toolkit for Councillors.

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Councillor John Chidlow
Chairman of the Induction of newly-elected Councillors Working Group

March 2015

Appendix

Proposed Induction Programme Outline for 2015

1. Timetable: Training should be provided over a reasonable period of time after the elections, not all at once, so as to allow new Members to assimilate their initial training and gain experience of their work as Councillors in order to place their training in the context of their function and duties.

- Avoid training overload.
- Avoid 'Too much, Too soon'.
- Provide opportunities for refresher courses.

2. Training Schedule: It is recommended that training should be provided in 3 stages: Priority training in the first month after the local election, then further training to be completed over the next 2 to 3 months, and finally training to be completed between 3 and 6 months after the election, as detailed more fully below.

There should be a balance of written information and presentations.

Training materials should incorporate diagrams and relevant pictures, not just text.

The information pack for new Members should be colour coded.

Reference should be made to the Local Government Association's '*Councillors' Guide for new Councillors*' and '*The 21st Century guide for new Members*'.

Reference should be made to the procedures, rules, protocols and codes in the HDC Constitution.

First Month

- Signing the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and the Register of Interests to be completed as soon as possible.
- An introductory meeting to be arranged with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.
- Horsham District Council IT systems.
- Use of the HDC Website, Intranet, and electronically stored information.
- Planning basics (some of the training could be given by experienced Members setting out 'what you really need to know').
- HDC Statutory Obligations.
- Code of Conduct and ethical practice.
- Provide the following information to all Councillors:

- (a) Organisation Chart with names/titles/departments of senior Officers.
 - (b) Cabinet Members, including Leader and Deputy with brief outline of responsibilities.
 - (c) Draft Calendar of Council meetings.
 - (d) Brief description of all committees and their remits/functions.
 - (e) Short description of the protocols and formalities of Council meetings.
 - (f) List of all Members – preferably with photographs.
 - (g) A glossary of acronyms.
 - (h) General information e.g. car parking and claiming travel expenses.
- Training in the use of iPads to be provided.
 - iPads, if requested, should be loaded with (or provide links to the relevant Council web pages):- HDC Constitution; National Planning Policy Framework; District Plan and supporting documents, e.g. Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA); Current Budget Book; HDC Code of Conduct.

2 to 3 Months

- Council Structure (including 'Functions and Responsibilities of the Council').
- How it operates in practice.
- How the Council is funded.
- Role(s) of Officers.
- Role of the Cabinet system.
- Roles of Cabinet Members.
- Training for Committee Chairmen to chair a meeting.
- A seminar for all councillors, including new Members, on planning decisions and planning appeals.

3 to 6 Months

- Ethics in Practice; e.g. refer to the publication by the Committee on Standards in Public Life – "*Ethics in Practice: Promoting Ethical Standards in Public Life*".