

29 February 2024		ITEM: 10
Standards and Audit Committee		
Member Training Schedule 2024/25		
Wards and communities affected: Not applicable	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Matthew Boulter, Head of Democratic, Scrutiny and Member Services		
Accountable Assistant Director: Not Applicable		
Accountable Director: Asmat Hussain, Interim Director of Law and Governance		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report sets out the member training schedule for 2024-25 and outlines ongoing work to enhance the programme following feedback from Members and Officers in 2023-24. The report also gives an update on the 'Member Training Passport' initiative and assistance with this scheme to date.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 To agree the Member Training Schedule for 2024/25.**
- 1.2 Make any further suggestions of sessions to add to the schedule for 2024/25.**
- 1.3 To discuss and support the categories for training sessions as indicated in the schedule: 'statutory', 'highly recommended' and 'recommended'.**
- 1.4 To support the ongoing change activity outlined in the report to enhance and improve training in coming years to support Members in their roles.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Member Training Schedule 2024/25 continues the core sessions that have been identified following the Best Value Inspection as essential for Members to undertake either as new Members or as refreshers for existing Members. Such sessions include code of conduct training and committee specific training, among others. The Schedule is attached at Appendix A.

2.2 The content and delivery of these sessions have been reviewed and refreshed for 2024/25, where applicable, using the Member feedback forms which were completed after each session in 2023/24. Appendix B sets out a summary analysis of the feedback for the 2023/24 schedule. The headline points have been:

- Members feel training is good overall and that sessions have helped them in their roles.
- Members felt Planning training needed to improve.
- Members had mixed opinions about mandatory requirements for certain sessions.

2.3 The 2024/25 schedule continues the practice of physically attended sessions which are mandatory for certain subjects. This ensures Members are able to fulfil their duties to an acceptable standard. The schedule details the mandatory requirements for each session.

Digital Academy

2.4 The Digital Academy is an online self-service training offer provided by the council to help both Members and officers develop more advanced skills in ICT and associated topics. Learners navigate the modules as directed by the training to learn at their own pace and convenience. This training is available through the Council's Oracle system, which is accessible online through the council's intranet. The link for the intranet is below and a screenshot of the academy home screen is attached at Appendix C.

<https://intranet.thurrock.gov.uk/>

These modules will continue to be offered alongside the schedule to enhance the training offer and provide advanced development for Members wishing to access it.

2.5 The modules on offer are arranged at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels and include Microsoft Sway, Sharepoint, Forms, Planner; communicating and sharing with Microsoft S365, tips on Microsoft teams and using mail merge. The advanced digital academy includes Excel shortcuts, creating fillable forms on word and creating live events in Teams.

Leadership Academy

2.6 The Leadership Academy is the Local Government Association's (LGA) flagship training programme and four senior Thurrock Members have undertaken this course in the 2023/24 year. Opportunities for 2024/25 are being explored with the LGA.

2.7 In addition all groups have been offered one to one coaching and mentoring through the Local Government Association (LGA). Three group leaders and two deputy leaders have taken this offer up as follows:

1. Councillor Andrew Jefferies – Mentor: Lord Gary Porter
2. Councillor Deb Arnold – Mentor: Councillor Philip Broadhead
3. Councillor John Kent – Mentor: Councillor Sir Stephen Houghton
4. Councillor Lynn Worrall – Mentor: Councillor Amanda Searjant
5. Councillor Neil Speight – Mentor: Councillor Loic Rich

Member Training Passports

- 2.8 Through feedback at the then Governance Recovery Board (GRB) it was established that more experienced Members needed to develop beyond the core training offer. With this in mind Members were asked to complete a skills audit to identify what training Members had completed, what skills and knowledge they already possessed through their non-council experience and what skills they may want to develop in future years. The proposal was designed to capture this information on a 'Member Passport' which is used in other councils and is considered a good approach to managing Individual Member training needs. The Member Passport is a good way for Members to take ownership of their own training needs and to help officers support them in those training needs. The Passport provides a framework for conversations about training both between Member and officer but also Member and Member.
- 2.9 A Member Passport is a short document which captures:
- The details of their term of office.
 - The training Members have already undertaken.
 - Member skills and experience which they may have gained outside the Council which may be of use to other Members and officers.
 - An outline of their aspirations or future needs in relation to training and development.
- 2.10 Members have been asked to assist in the establishment of the passports by filling in their passport as best they can. The passport templates were shared in the summer of 2023 and group whips were involved in subsequent direct email requests to complete the passports. The initiative was further supported by the Member newsletter, which highlighted the request across a number of editions.
- 2.11 The future use and management of the passports will be for Member Services to keep a file of all passports and update them as and when Members undertake training. It is hoped that group leaders can use the passports to support the development of their fellow Members in one to ones and for the Council to use the data to identify potential learning gaps and provide training appropriately. The aim is to roll out the passports in the spring of 2024 so that they are embedded for the new municipal year.
- 2.12 Following several months of collection, 18 out of 49 Members have completed and returned the passport. This represented:

- 10 Labour
- 7 Conservative
- 1 Non-political Alliance of Independent Councillors (NPAIC)

2 Members have declined to fill the form in, one Member from the Conservative Group and one Member from NPAIC. Only 36% of Members have therefore engaged positively with this initiative.

Enhancing Training and Development

- 2.13 Based on feedback, there is a need to engage with Members differently on training, to ensure mutual expectations are set out and Members understand the part they play in achieving learning outcomes and how this should be applied in their role within the Council. Therefore, in 2024, a project will be undertaken by the change team to increase the engagement and use of the Member Passports to strengthen the Member participation in their own development, to help group leaders and whips manage the skills and learning of their groups and to help officers understand what training sessions will serve the Members best each year.
- 2.14 Using the information gathered from the existing Member Passports and the feedback from 2023/24, a suite of additional development needs has been identified by Members:
- Public speaking
 - ICT skills
 - Finance skills
 - Use of social media
 - Understanding the constitution
- 2.15 These topics will form the basis of a learning needs analysis which officers will collaborate with groups and individual Members on in order to ensure future additions and enhancements to the training schedule are relevant, useful and are supported by Members. This work will begin in the 2023/24 year and will use the membership of the recently established Member Training and Development Sub-Committee as a starting point to begin conversations.
- 2.16 Members will be aware that there is potential for the standards and audit functions to split into two separate committees and therefore the proposal from 2024/25 is that Member training will be brought back into the dedicated Standards Committee, which will have the capacity to oversee Member development.
- 2.17 Officers will continue the practice of skills analysis each year, in conjunction with group leaders and whips, to best understand the current Membership of the Council and any learning gaps. Additional Modules/sessions will then be introduced to respond to those needs.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The provision and take up of training will be monitored throughout 2024/25 to evaluate its usefulness and relevance to Members. Following each training session, Members will be asked to complete a training evaluation form. This feedback, alongside the development work outlined in section 2 above, will be used to shape future Member training.
- 3.2 Key training sessions were made mandatory in 2023/24. Some Members felt that not all training should be mandatory. Through this report the Standards and Audit Committee are asked to their support for a tiered system to help Members chose which sessions are right for them:
- i) Statutory – Members of certain committees will be required to attend these sessions.
 - ii) Highly Recommended – Members will be strongly encouraged to attend these sessions.
 - iii) Recommended – Members will be encouraged to attend these sessions.

It is accepted that for quasi-judicial committees (Licensing and Planning), Members will attend statutory training annually.

- 3.3 The individual learning and further training requirements of Members will begin to be tracked through the training schedule and developed into supporting documentation to help Members identify their future development needs.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Member Training Schedule is a key part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan and requires the Standards and Audit Committee's input and support to ensure Member ownership of the offer.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The Senior Leadership Team and Directorate Management Teams have had the opportunity to comment on the training schedule. The schedule was further shared with group leaders in early 2024.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The training schedule aligns with the priorities and requirements of council business and ensures Members have access to up to date and relevant training to undertake their roles as both committee members but also as community representatives and leaders. The schedule reinforces the good governance of the council and its decision-making processes. The cultural development aspects of the report support the Council's improvement priorities as identified by commissioners.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Finance Manager (15/12/23)

The training schedule is intended to be delivered within existing budgets reserved for Member Training. Additional sessions and activity related to the improvement and recovery of the council following intervention may be covered by the additional funding provided through the Local Government Association.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Governance Lawyer & Deputy Monitoring Officer
(18/12/23)

The Monitoring Officer is responsible for good governance of the Council and to ensure that Councillors adhere to high standards of conduct in discharging their duties as elected representatives of the Council.

In accordance with provisions set out in the Council's Constitution, Councillors are required to undertake the following mandatory training:

- It is a requirement of the Members Code of Conduct that all Councillors undertake Code of Conduct training provided by the Council.
- The Committee Procedure Rules state that a Committee may make it a requirement of any Member participating as a Member of that Committee or of a Sub-Committee that the Member has undertaken appropriate training in the roles and responsibilities of Members in discharging the functions of the Committee or Sub-Committee, and may arrange for the provision of such training to all, or all new, Members of the Committee or Sub-Committee.
- The Council's Planning Code of Good Practice and also the Licensing Protocol, expressly states that Members of the Planning Committee and the Licensing Committee should not participate in decision making of the relevant committee dealing with planning and or licensing matters if mandatory training prescribed by the Council has not been completed.

Decisions made by Planning Committee and Licensing Committee are quasi-judicial and can be subject to legal challenge. Knowledge of planning law,

licensing law and procedures and their application, together with general decision-making principles are essential to ensure that decision making is in accordance with Planning and licensing law.

It is important for councillors to demonstrate high standards and are regularly updated with the necessary knowledge and skills relating to their roles and responsibilities as Councillors. The Member Training Schedule and the additional development needs set out in this report would assist Councillors to carry out their roles properly and effectively.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**

Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities Adults, Housing and Health Directorate (15/12/23)

Training will be provided in venues and in formats that are accessible with reasonable adjustments where required to ensure council fulfils responsibilities set out in the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

There is a requirement for Members to undertake Equality and Diversity training which is accounted for in the schedule. A Member briefing on Community and Equality Impact Assessment has also been organised.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Various training sessions impact upon important services and priorities of the council and will upskill Members in their decision making and knowledge when dealing with these issues both at committee but also as community leaders.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A – Member Training Schedule 2024/25
- Appendix B - Analysis summary of feedback and attendance for 2023/24 training schedule.
- Appendix C – Screenshot of digital skills academy homepage

Report Author:

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Legal Services