

COUNCILLOR CONDUCT COMMITTEE

15 JUNE 2022

MEMBER CONDUCT TRAINING – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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Summary

This report informs the Councillor Conduct Committee about some proposed training for Councillors on the topic of roles and responsibilities, with particular reference to member roles on outside bodies.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. The Councillor Conduct Committee has a role in promoting and maintaining high standards of conducts by Councillors and voting and non-voting co-opted members.

2. Background

2.1. The last few years in most aspects of life have been different for most individuals and organisations, with many aspects being placed on hold or deferred to a later date. This is true for training provided to elected Members in respect of the code of conduct.

2.2. Whilst the code of conduct remains the same since all councillors were last elected, the operating environment has changed;

- There is an increased use of social media
- Increased working/performing of the role from a domestic environment
- Forthcoming elections which will lead to increased political activity
- Different way of working by the local authority (e.g. LATCos).

Thus, it considered that a timely refresher would be beneficial which will also provide an opportunity for discussion of emergent issues.

- 2.3. The Council's Monitoring Officer, who also provides a similar role for Gravesham Council, is proposing holding a training event in the autumn at that Council which will be repeated a couple of weeks hence at Gun Wharf for Medway Councillors. It is proposed that Councillors from both Councils could attend either event to maximise opportunity of attendance.
- 2.4. It is proposed to run a two-part session, the first part is aimed for all members, with the second a more focused session aimed at Cabinet Members/directors of local authority companies.
- 2.5. Officers are looking to use an external trainer to deliver the two part session. The trainer is a recognised expert in local authority governance, having worked as an in-house lawyer for almost 20 years across four local authorities before moving to Bevan Brittan LLP to lead the local government team there and now specialises in member and officer development for local authorities. She also has direct experience as a non-executive director of a local authority energy company and Chair of a charity.

3. Part 1

- 3.1. The first session will be a general session suitable for all elected members. It is proposed to hold the session on a face-to-face basis to maximise discussion and engagement. The session will cover the responsibilities of councillors and to understand the standards of behaviour required (including the registration and declaration of interests) at both Council forums and on outside bodies. In particular, the session will cover:

- The importance of probity in public life – why does it matter?
- The conduct and behaviour expected of elected councillors
- Interests, conflicts, bias and predetermination
- The roles and responsibilities of a councillor on an outside body
- How to deal with conflicts
- Mini scenarios for discussion

- 3.2. By the end of the session Members should fully understand the standard of conduct and behaviour required of an elected councillor and be confident in the codes and protocols which apply, whether this is in their role at internal council meetings or as a representative on an outside body.

4. Part 2

- 4.1. As stated above, the second session will be targeted to an audience of Cabinet Members/Directors of local authority companies. It will build on the learning from the first session and apply the principles and rules to local authority companies and other models. In particular, the session will cover:
 - Local authority delivery through:
 - Local authority trading companies
 - Other commercial models
 - Property/housing models
 - Joint ventures

- Legal responsibilities and governance issues
- Roles of councillors in corporate models including:
 - As a director on the board
 - As a shareholder/owner
- Conflicts, declarations of interest and confidentiality – balancing the different roles and ensuring probity
- Learning from recent reports on council company failures

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Inadvertent breach of the code of conduct due to different operating environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application to social media • Conducting meetings via remote links • Heightened political activity prior to elections • Councillor performing dual roles 	Opportunity to refresh understanding, discuss real life scenarios, consider mitigation strategies	D3

6. Financial implications

6.1. The cost of the training will be funded from existing budget.

7. Legal implications

7.1. Legal implications are set out in the body of the report.

8. Recommendations

8.1. The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and support the provision of the training.

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.