

Member Development External Training Policy review

Recommendation 1: That the current arrangements for Members to go to external training are amended to reflect those detailed in this report.

Recommendation 2: That these arrangements are piloted and reviewed in a year's time.

1. Introduction

This report aims to respond to the minute *21 from the Procedures Committee¹ to look at the member development strategy with a particular focus on how Members are supported to access learning opportunities provided by external agencies and providers. This issue has also been raised at the Member Development Steering Group. This paper proposes changes to the current offer as detailed.

2. Current Offer

Devon County Councillors are supported to develop through different methods depending on needs which are identified as part of a one to one interview. This approach uses a skills framework to consider needs and the Senior Workforce Development Advisor currently facilitates this conversation. Current mechanisms by which Members are supported include:

- **Self-Development** – A Councillor identifies that they need to know more and undertakes to pursue this by attending committees, tailored research, or from Council Officers or Councillors
- **Scrutiny Masterclasses** – which offer a rolling programme of learning around subjects related to the Scrutiny Committee, these are determined by the Members of the Scrutiny Committee.
- **Briefings before Full Council** – similar to masterclasses, where training is offered to a larger group of Members on pressing issues.
- **E-learning modules** including the modern councillor modules – these can be undertaken in a flexible way to suit the Councillor.
- **Shared Service learning events** – externally facilitated events organised at a regional level
- **Bespoke Training Events** - Commissioned to meet a specific need delivered either internally or externally
- **Approved Conferences** – see table below

Training/Conference and provider	Eligibility
LGA – https://local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership .	Members volunteered by Political Group

¹ <http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=157&MId=2115&Ver=4>

Training/Conference and provider	Eligibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership Academy - Leadership Essentials 	
Local Government Association Annual Conference	Representatives appointed by the County Council to the LGA General Assembly
SW Councils - http://www.swcouncils.gov.uk/ngcontent.cfm?a_id=11475&tt=swra - 21st century councillor	Members volunteered by Political Group/identified through personal development interview
National Children's and Adults Services Conference <i>[NB: This replaces the former separate LGA Education and Social Services Annual Conferences]</i>	Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Schools; Adult Social Care and Health Services and the Chair of the Children's Scrutiny Committee and Health & Adult Care Scrutiny Committee
County Councils Network Annual Conference	Representatives appointed by the County Council to the CCN Council

Attendance at any other conference(s) currently requires the specific approval of the Leader of the Council with a presumption that attendance will not be permitted unless a case is made.

In determining if a case has been made for a specific approval or to Conferences being added to the approved list, consideration will be given to:

- ☐ the views of the relevant Cabinet Member and Chief Officer on the desirability/relevance of attendance at the event;
- ☐ the significance of the event;
- ☐ all party representation being appropriate; or
- ☐ representation rotating between groups on an annual basis;
- ☐ attendance being authorised but with a 'lesser' category of allowances payable (e.g. travelling & subsistence only).

Comments made at the Member Development Steering Group in response to proposals to review the current policy included:

- The benefits of attending a range of free courses provided by the Local Government Association, whilst acknowledging that the associated travel and accommodation could still be costly;
- The role of officers in recommending particular courses relevant to the roles or training needs of Members;
- That if demand for a particular course or subject area was high, it could be more beneficial to look at providing this training in house or through the Shared Service.

3. Other Authorities Approaches

In conducting research for this paper, we initiated a survey of Member Development arrangements through South West Councils. We asked comparator authorities questions about their member development budget, how Members were informed of training opportunities, which opportunities were taken up and how Members were selected to attend. Although responses were limited, there were detailed answers from the respondents and some examples of alternative approaches have been identified.

Overall budgets for Member Development tend to be similar to Devon's, although it is worth noting that Devon has a larger number of Members than the responding authorities.

Practices for identifying training needs and selecting Members to attend external conferences and training differed across authorities, including seeking agreement from Member Development Groups and through the relevant Chief Officer.

Examples of providers and courses used by other local authorities included:

- CIPFA (Understanding Local Government Finance, Impact of Brexit on Public Services in the South West)
- LGA (Annual Local Government Finance Conference 2018, The future of Adult Social Care: sticking plasters or the road to full recovery?)
- CCN Annual Conference
- ADEPT Annual Conference
- Training and Business Consultancy Ltd (team building)

4. Proposed Changes to the current offer

Responding to the concerns raised at the Member Development Steering Group and considering the approaches taken by other authorities this paper recommends changes to the current approach. To ensure the best use is made of training opportunities and the greatest value is achieved it is proposed that a framework of conditions which could apply to any opportunity to complement the current limited list. The strengths of this approach are that Members can identify and be eligible for opportunities that are not currently available. The framework would help to ensure that the approach taken is equitable and proportionate.

Suggestions on how this could work are detailed below:

Framework:

To be eligible for consideration on any external training opportunity Members of the Council must meet the following requirements:

- Submit the expression of interest in a course to the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Team as early as possible - ideally a month before the date of the training in question;
- The attendee must have undertaken a Personal Development Interview (within the last 12 months);
- Demonstrate practical application of the training in their role at Devon County Council (for example in their work as Chair of a Scrutiny Committee);
- Undertake to share the learning from the development opportunity either through a simple written template and/or through a presentation of the learning as appropriate.

If many more Members apply for training than there is the budget to support there will be a competitive consideration with the final decision being made by the budget holder for this area, the Head of Democratic Services in liaison with the Leader of the Council as appropriate.

5. Contact

For all enquiries about this report or its contents please contact

Camilla de Bernhardt Lane, Head of Scrutiny Cam.debernhardtlane@devon.gov.uk