

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 2nd September 2003	MEETING NAME Standards Committee
Report title:		Southwark Member Development Programme	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Chief Executive (Borough Solicitor & Secretary)	

RECOMMENDATION (S)

1. That Standards Committee:
 - considers and comments on the proposal for an annual member development programme as described below
 - agrees to act as champion for member training and development within Southwark and
 - asks officers to report progress to future meetings

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. An officer project team working to the Borough Solicitor and the Chief Executive as part of the Forward@Southwark improvement programme has been asked to look at existing member training activity, identify gaps and pull it together into an annual programme of training, development and information support to members. While Standards Committee does not have responsibility for resourcing member training, it does have a remit for ensuring the provision of training for members around ethical issues and logically take a broader view. It is ideally placed by virtue of its membership and its constitutional role to champion member training and development.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

3. Member training in Southwark is delivered in part by the Borough Solicitor in support of members' individual and representational roles and as decision makers on the non-scrutiny forums of the council, in part by the Head of Corporate Strategy in relation to scrutiny, and by other directors in response to specifically identified needs. Recent examples of the latter category include for example FMS organising a risk management seminar for members, and social services providing training for members serving on the Disciplinary Appeals Sub Committee Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Panel. There is also a range of "softer" activity such as exec members and opposition spokespersons receiving briefings from directors, and members taking part in visits to other authorities to learn about their experience and best practice on key initiatives.
4. The picture that emerges is that there is a good degree of activity but that no one officer (or member) has previously had an overview on which to base judgements about gaps or areas to develop for future years.

However, the reorganisation of support to members has resulted in the creation of a refocussed Head of Constitutional and Member Services and an E-governance and Member Development officer post, so there is now a resource in place to pull the strands of activity together into a coordinated and evaluated programme.

5. In preparation, the officer project team have looked at existing training activity in Southwark and a range of other authorities, spoken to various groupings of members, and will be attending all three party group meetings in the coming weeks to discuss the following framework.

6. Components of annual member development programme

Role descriptions for members

Standards Committee has previously recommended role/job descriptions in the context of member allowances. These would serve the dual role of assisting public understanding of different member roles in the modern constitutional arrangements, and enabling member training arrangements to be tailored to specific member roles. If Standards Committee accepts that role descriptions could play a useful part in the framework, officers will consult formally with whips on behalf of all members for discussion at October Council Assembly.

Annual training needs assessment

It is proposed that all members holding a chair (including the mayor) of any committee or sub-committee and all executive members are offered the opportunity of an annual training needs assessment. In the first year at least, this would take the form of a confidential one to one interview to consider members' own view of their learning and development needs in their role. (As the system beds in, it could potentially be organised as a self-assessment online or by letter/email survey.) These would then be written up into personal plans for the members concerned, and an overall training and development plan would be brought to Standards Committee. It is suggested that this assessment is offered to chairs and executive members only in order to learn and to keep the process manageable for the remainder of this year, but is then evaluated and made available to all members for 2004/5 onwards.

Existing patterns of training activity suggest that the training and development plan would contain a mix of:

- generic skills issues, eg chairing skills, scrutiny questioning skills
- technical issues, eg need for internal/external briefing around specific questions
- personal skills issues, eg time management, IT, casework

These needs could be met by a combination of approaches, some of which require dedicated resources and some not. If for example the training needs assessments shows a pool of demand for **generic skills training**, then relevant courses need to be commissioned. However, if this is analysed at a fairly high level and commissioned to Southwark needs (as opposed to buying off the shelf packages) it may be possible to contain such training within existing budgets, for example it would be entirely realistic to plan an annual

chairing skills training session picking up on issues chairs have discussed in existing forums and in their own training needs assessments.

Regular briefing sessions for all members

Many information and training needs are common to all members irrespective of their roles and it is proposed that these are addressed partly through briefing sessions and partly through improved information support. The project team is keen to seek members' feedback on whether there should be for example a monthly member briefing evening on planned topics particularly around issues arising in members' casework. This could be service based, a "surgery" session with a senior management team, or seasonal eg a briefing on schools admissions just before decision letters go out to parents. The alternative approach would be to run an annual member induction programme at around the time of annual council, so that it becomes geared towards members' induction into their roles for the new year. Clearly, a programme of activity timed around annual council would not entirely replace the need for ad hoc briefings on issues that arise through the year, but it could provide helpful focus at a time when members are thinking about new roles.

Information support to members

One key issue that has emerged is the patchy provision of information support to members. A pilot member web portal project is being established and a range of members have been invited to take part. This is likely to be the key driver of improved support. Officers can provide more detailed information to Standards if members would find that useful. In essence, this should create the potential for an online members information resource. The E-governance and Member Development officer will have specific responsibility for working with members and IT to develop this facility.

7. Reason for lateness and urgency

By its nature, a member development programme needs to be owned by both the political groups and the formal decision making process. The approach discussed in this report will be presented to all 3 party groups at end of August/early September. This report seeks formal endorsement for officers to take the proposals to those forums for reporting back to future meetings of Standards.

8. Financial implications

The main budget for member training is held within Member Support, and there are also budgets within the Community Council and Scrutiny areas that can be used for member training specific to those areas of activity. Officers will seek to contain as much activity as possible within those budgets and to use in-house resources where appropriate, but as the detailed training needs emerge from the assessment process outlined above, it is likely that a bid may need to be made for additional resources for 2004/5,

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
N/a		

APPENDIX A

Audit Trail

Lead Officer	Deborah Holmes, Borough Solicitor and Secretary	
Report Author	Shelley Burke, Head of Overview and Scrutiny	
Version		
Dated	27 August 2003	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Executive Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services		