

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

28 November 2017

Overview and Scrutiny Councillor Learning and Development Programme 2017-2021

Purpose

1. To initiate councillor discussions regarding an effective four-year learning and development (L&D) programme for Overview and Scrutiny (OS) councillors during the 2017-21 council.

Background

2. OS is a statutory function, is well defined in the council's Constitution and is integral within its decision making processes. As well as the generic skills needed to be an effective councillor additional competencies are essential to deliver the requirements of a "scrutineer". All non-executive councillors qualify to undertake this role in one form or another.
3. The Management Committee has a responsibility to ensure that those councillors undertaking overview and scrutiny activity have appropriate knowledge and skills to add value to the process and deliver outcomes. This should sit alongside the wider councillor development programme, which is currently being developed.
4. During the previous council, Management Committee recognised the benefit of having a structured OS L&D programme in place, rather than making ad hoc requests for individual sessions. This enabled L&D activities to be scheduled to reflect the changing needs of councillors across a four-year council term.
5. The OS councillor L&D programme under the previous council was designed in close collaboration with, and largely facilitated by, an external consultant with long experience of OS in Wiltshire and an established relationship with the council. This resource had the advantages of an external, national perspective with specialist OS knowledge and an impartial facilitator of sometimes difficult conversations about OS's successes and challenges. These advantages are obviously not available in-house. For 2017-2021, in order that the available resources can be used to best effect, the Scrutiny function will need to consider which L&D activities would be most enhanced by external input, and the financial implications.
6. The total annual budget available for Councillor L&D is £10,000, though only a proportion of that would be allocated to OS activities. The cost of whole-day input

from an external consultant (including preparation) has previously been £600-800, with sessions usually being half-day events.

Main considerations

7. The following list of OS L&D activities is not exhaustive and is intended as a starting point for wider discussion of what OS councillors feel would help them fulfil their role based on their experiences thus far this council. Following this initial discussion, further work will be done on a four year L&D programme led by the Chairman and Vice-chairman and involving input from the council's learning and development team, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and, if appropriate, external contributors.
8. The Committee may wish to consider the outcomes of the LGA Peer Challenge and the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Review of OS in Local Government when considering the final OS L&D programme to ensure that any findings relating to OS are addressed. Both reports will be available and brought to Committee in the new year.
9. It has often been valuable to invite Executive councillors to join OS L&D events, recognising the two-way nature of OS and the value of the Executive's perspective on improving OS processes and outcomes.

L&D activity or topic	Notes
Ongoing	
Ad hoc external OS events	<p>Councillors undertaking reviews on specific topics (particularly those in the leading positions) may wish to attend relevant external conferences or training events.</p> <p>This may also include generic scrutiny skills training, such that provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS).</p>
Service-based learning, e.g. pre-committee meeting information briefings	Councillors undertaking service reviews, particularly on the key corporate programmes or areas of significant change (for example, due to new legislation), may wish to request briefings or training on these from officers or external witnesses.
Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Annual Conference	Wiltshire always attends this annual national event and report back learning points to Committee.
National and regional OS Network meetings	Wiltshire regularly attends the regional and national OS networks where councillors and officers share key reviews, innovative approaches and discuss national issues relating to OS.

National OS reviews	The council recently contributed to the CLG's Review of OS in local government and, once its report is published, the committee will want to consider how the findings could help develop the function further.
E-learning	The council is making increasing use of E-learning modules for both councillors and officers. This could potentially include an OS-focused module, either training on OS basics (how to request an agenda item etc.) or on specific aspects of the OS process.
2017	
OS basics (induction)	The Councillor Induction following the 2017 elections included a two part introduction to OS. This was attended by 38 councillors and the feedback received was very positive overall.
2018/19/20	
Chairing skills	<p>Chairing OS committee or task group meetings requires additional skills to those required to participate as a regular member and is key to the activity's success.</p> <p>These include: Managing meetings, steering the work programme, taking a leading role in creating the final report and reporting findings to committee and the executive.</p>
Questioning and listening skills	Getting the most value from witnesses, covering topics like questioning styles and active listening.
Choosing, gathering and analysing evidence	OS reviews can require a variety of evidence gathering techniques and ways of approaching its analysis. This session could potentially make use of the council's Systems Thinking and Audit expertise and evidence.
Developing a forward work programme / establishing priorities	With finite resources it is important that the OS work programme continues to focus on the council's priorities and where it can add most value.
Successful OS task groups	<p>Task groups are often where the most impactful OS work takes place. L&D in this area could cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When to have a task group • Scoping the review

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing evidence and witnesses • Analysis • Forming findings and recommendations • Fact checking • Recommendation tracking
OS-Executive/Partner relationships	To maximise understanding of the scrutiny function and its working relationship with the Executive and major partners.
Budget and performance scrutiny	Financial Planning Task Group leads OS engagement in both these area, but scrutiny of any service or issue could be enhanced by an understanding of the financial and performance aspects.
Scrutiny of contracts and contractors/partners	There has been OS engagement on a number of major council contracts in recent years, such as highways and streetscene. A task group to monitor the waste disposal contracts is proposed elsewhere on the agenda. Scrutinising partners or contractors requires a different approach to scrutiny of those with a statutory responsibility to engage with OS.
Community Governance	Engaging the public, communities and area boards in OS and understanding relevant referral processes such as the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA).
2021	
Review of OS 2017-21	At the end of each four year term OS conducts an in-depth review of its key activities and overall effectiveness. Findings and recommendations are then reported to the next Council for it consider areas of improvement.

Proposal

10. That Committee considers the potential OS L&D activities set out above and any others that could support councillors in delivering an effective OS function.
11. That the findings of the recent Peer Challenge and the CLG's Review of OS in Local Government are reflected if and when appropriate in the final four year OS L&D programme.

12. That following this initial discussion, a draft four-year OS L&D programme is developed by officers and the Chairman, Vice-chairman and brought back to Committee for approval.

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