

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

5 June 2018

Overview and Scrutiny Councillor Learning and Development Programme 2017-21

Purpose

1. To propose a learning and development (L&D) programme for Overview and Scrutiny (OS) councillors during the 2017-21 council.

Background

2. 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 OS activity have appropriate knowledge and skills to add value to the process and deliver outcomes.
4. In November 2017, Management Committee approved an outline OS learning and development programme 2017-21. It then asked the Chairman and Vice-chairman to bring a more detailed programme back for approval.

Main considerations

5. The proposed programme encompasses existing, ‘business-as-usual’ activities (e.g. pre-meeting briefings), attendance at external events (e.g. OS networks) and a programme of thematic workshops delivered inhouse.
6. The programme under the previous council involved a significant amount of design and delivery from an external consultant. That programme was also designed to cover an entire four-year council term. Following discussion with the Chairman and Vice-chairman, it is proposed that a smaller number of workshops are designed and scheduled now, retaining flexibility to reflect councillors’ developing training needs at a later date.
7. In order to make best use of resources, it is proposed that some sessions are supported by the council’s Scrutiny team, some by Learning and Development and some, when appropriate, using external input.
8. It is also proposed that opportunities for OS councillors to attend external L&D events be expanded. The current criteria restricts the payment of attendance

costs to councillors holding positions attracting a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA), e.g. cabinet members and committee chairmen. It is proposed that this criteria be broadened to those OS councillors undertaking relevant, dedicated work e.g. task group members, OS representatives on programme boards or nominated leads on relevant topics. Approvals for attendance would be overseen by the Management Committee Chairman and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services.

9. It has often been valuable to invite Executive councillors to join OS L&D workshops, recognising the two-way nature of OS and the value of the Executive's perspective on improving OS processes and outcomes.
10. The proposed programme of workshops has been developed following a survey of non-executive councillors asking them to prioritise a range of topics and competencies relevant to OS work. The full results of the survey are attached at Appendix 1. Higher scoring topics are reflected in the workshops proposed below (either through a dedicated session or within a broader session).

Proposed programme

Workshop	Content
1. OS basics (complete)	The Councillor Induction following the 2017 elections included a two part introduction to OS.
2. Making overview and scrutiny meetings effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item selection (choosing topics) • Invitees • Preparation • Chairing • Debate • Witnesses / public • Resolutions • Follow-up
3. Gathering and using evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence types • Hierarchy of evidence • Weighting and triangulating • Avoiding bias • Innovative approaches • Analysing performance
4. Questioning and listening skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active listening • Questioning styles • Systems thinking questions • Appreciative and critical enquiry
5. Evaluation of OS 2017-21 NB. To be held in 2021.	At the end of each four year term OS conducts an in-depth review of its activities and effectiveness. Findings and recommendations are reported to

	the next Council for it to consider areas for improvement.
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Ongoing L&D activity	Content
Ad hoc external OS events	Councillors undertaking reviews on specific topics may wish to attend relevant external conferences or training events.
Service-based learning	Councillors undertaking service reviews, particularly on the key corporate programmes, 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.
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 on specific aspects of the OS process.

Proposal

11. To approve the proposed OS councillor learning and development programme.
12. To note that the programme will be periodically reviewed by the Chairman and Vice-chairman, with further activities to be added when agreed by Committee.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Survey results – OS councillor training needs

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The survey was sent to all non-executive councillors, who were asked to score each of the topics listed as very valuable, somewhat valuable, not sure, or not valuable. 16 responses were received. The answers were then scored and the topics ranked as follows:

Rank	Topic	Score
1.	Making scrutiny meetings effective	36
2.	Gathering and using evidence	33
3.	Choosing which topics to address	31
	Scrutinising performance	31
4.	Questioning and listening skills	28
	Scrutinising finance	28
5.	Scrutinising contracts	26
6.	Chairing scrutiny meetings	25
7.	OS-Executive working relationships	24