



**STANDARDS COMMITTEE:
15 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Report of: Legal and Democratic Services Manager

**Contact for further information: Miss K Breakell (Extn 3312)
(E-mail: kirsty.breakell@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: ANNUAL MONITORING OF TRAINING 2019/20

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider and evaluate the effectiveness of the training undertaken to date in relation to the Code of Conduct and standards.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the training undertaken and the evaluation of it be noted.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 One of the key roles of the Standards Committee is to ensure that Members are properly trained in the requirements of the Code of Conduct. The Council, as part of the Localism Act 2011 (Section 27), has a statutory role to promote and maintain high standards of conduct for its elected and co-opted Members.

4.0 TRAINING REQUIREMENT

4.1 There are four main aspects to training:-

- Standards Framework – statutory role (Localism Act 2011 - Section 27)
- General obligations
- Registration and disclosure of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) (probably the most complex area), Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests.
- The need to notify the Monitoring Officer of changes to the Register including notification of gifts and hospitality.

Standards Framework

4.2 This would cover the framework for receiving complaints, the local code, dealing with sanctions and include the roles of:-

- the Monitoring Officer
- the Independent Persons
- the Standards Committee

General Obligations

4.3 This would cover:-

- general principles governing conduct (seven principles)
- when the code applies (when acting as a representative of the Council)
- the duty not to disclose confidential information
- access to information
- bringing the authority into disrepute
- improperly conferring an advantage or disadvantage
- legal obligations
- use of resources
- publicity
- advice of Statutory Officers
- reasons for decisions

Declarations of Interest

4.4 Historically, the most difficult area for Members has been to understand when interests need to be declared, and, in particular, to recognise what type of interest is involved.

4.5 This would include:-

- when does the duty to disclose arise? How much detail must be given?
- what are disclosable pecuniary interests?
- what is a pecuniary interest?
- what is a non-pecuniary interest?
- when does a non-pecuniary interest become a pecuniary interest?
- when do you have to leave a meeting?
- how/when to apply for a dispensation

The Register of Members' Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, pecuniary interests and notifiable non-pecuniary interests

4.6 This would cover:-

- what has to be declared to the Monitoring Officer
- when it has to be done
- rights of public inspection, including publication on the Council's web-site.

Equality Enactments

4.7 This would cover:-

- the Equality Act 2010 and associated regulations.
- the positive duty on all Councils to have regard to the need to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - advance equality of opportunity between different groups and foster good relations between different groups.

5.0 DELIVERY OF TRAINING

Code of Conduct

5.1 From the adoption of the first Code of Conduct in 2002 and subsequently those adopted in 2007 and 2012, training sessions have been held regularly either by external providers e.g. North West Employers', Bevan Brittan and Weightmans Solicitors or in-house. With the introduction of the revised Code of Conduct in 2007 we moved to an Annual Seminar/Workshop. These were useful case study sessions with model answers which has continued to be a successful mode of training. In 2017 the Code of Conduct training was facilitated by Geldards LLP and provided an interactive training experience which included a Standards Quiz, background to the law regulating Member conduct and WLBC Code of Conduct. In 2018 the training was facilitated by Weightmans LLP and returned to a workshop session with case study and model answers.

5.3 In 2019 we continued with the Annual Seminar/Workshop model which was facilitated by Simon Goacher from Weightmans LLP and was held on 9 July 2019. The feedback received was positive and indicated that attendees were either very satisfied or satisfied with this training.

5.4 Covid restrictions have prevented the holding of the traditional annual seminar/workshop session this summer. Given the anticipated publication of the final draft of the LGA's model Code of Conduct in Autumn 2020, which will be reported to Standards Committee when available, to consider any necessary changes to the WLBC code, it is proposed to hold a seminar/workshop session once any changes to the code are made so that members are trained and have an awareness of the most up to date version of the code.

INDUCTION AND OTHER METHODS/TRAINING

5.5 Newly elected Councillors are introduced to the Code at the Induction Sessions. Given the postponement of the May 2020 elections to May 2021 there has been no new intake of councillors this year. Induction training planned for the 2021 intake includes training on interests arising under the Code, the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations and specific training in relation to Planning and Licensing. Consideration is planned to be given to the induction process applied in Parish Councils.

5.6 Members may also attend external training on the Code should they so wish and any other relevant training to assist them in their role. Following the elections in 2019, four of the newly elected Borough Councillors attended the Local

Government Association (LGA) facilitated training event 'Hitting the Ground Running' on 27 June 2019 at County Hall in Preston.

6.0 GUIDANCE

- 6.1 Guidance to Members and Parishes on the Code has been issued by the Monitoring Officer at regular intervals. Members are advised by email annually about the need to keep their Register up-to-date, usually following the May elections. An annual letter is also sent, via email, to Parish Clerks for them to remind their Parish Councillors of their obligations under the Code to keep their Register up-to-date.

7.0 MONITORING

- 7.1 Details are kept of attendance at training sessions, so the Standards Committee are able to monitor the take up of the training.
- 7.2 the success of the training is assessed each year by a customer satisfaction questionnaire after each training event and can be followed up by asking Members if they need further training on certain aspects, or a general "refresher".

8.0 IDENTIFICATION OF TRAINING NEEDS AND TRAINING PLANS

- 8.1 Training offered and undertaken by each Borough Councillor is recorded on their individual Training Plan. Members new to the Council are issued with an Identification of Training Needs (ITN) questionnaire, through the induction process, to identify their learning and development needs. This can be followed up with 'one to one' if preferred. The Independent Persons are also included in this exercise.

9.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The training provided will assist in promoting high ethical Standards which will in turn contribute to achievement of the Community Strategy.

10.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The costs of providing training on standards is met from existing budget provision.

11.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 Training is provided to ensure Members are fully aware of the requirements placed upon them. This will enable them to avoid being in breach of the Code of Conduct with all the adverse consequences which would necessarily flow. Specific training for Standards Committee Members is provided to enable them to carry out their duties effectively.

12.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

12.1 Ensuring high standards of member conduct supports health (in particular mental health) and wellbeing within West Lancashire. This report provides an update on training given to members to help to ensure high standards are maintained

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendices

None.