

AN APPROACH TO TRAINING – DISCUSSION PAPER
(Report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following their first determination hearing and the issues which emerged from the cases heard in terms of knowledge of the Code of Conduct and training provision, the Committee asked for further information on training for Councillors in ethical standards and the Codes of Conduct.

2. CURRENT APPROACH AND ACTIVITIES

- 2.1 The current approach to training is as follows -

Events for Huntingdonshire Councillors and Parishes	Annual Programme
Induction training for new Members of District Council's Development Control Panel session include reference to Members Planning Code of Good Practice.	May
Induction training for new District Councillors - session included on the Code of Conduct.	June
Training on Code of Conduct offered to new Members and new clerks of town and parish councils (invitation also extended to existing Members)	either July/Sept
Training hosted by South Cambridgeshire District Council – hearings procedure – joint exercise with Cambridgeshire authorities.	either February/September
Courses offered by LGG – Leading training provider for local councils (attended by Members of the Standards Committee)	Ad hoc
Attendance at Annual Assembly of Standards Committees (Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer and nominated Members of Committee)	Annually in the Autumn

- 2.2 From observation and liaison with other authorities in Cambridgeshire in respect of their activities on Code of Conduct issues it is evident that there is no model approach to training and indeed it would appear that it focuses mainly upon new Members of the principal authorities and the organisation of an annual event for town and

parish councils. Feedback on those sessions suggest that these too are not very well attended.

- 2.3 Members of the Standards Committee in East Cambridgeshire District Council have offered to give Parish Councils updates on “probity issues” but again the take up for these sessions has been slow. (12 out of 35 parishes this year – exercise to be repeated in spring/summer 2006). Members of the Committee agreed to share the training responsibility concluding that it would be more effective to go out to Parish Council meetings rather than host a poorly attended session centrally. The Standards Committee in South Cambridgeshire are also reconsidering the training needs of their Councillors with a view to arranging sessions in the spring.
- 2.4 Members may recall that in November, the Monitoring Officer wrote to all parish councils to invite them to act as advocates in their parishes and to remind Members of important key messages in relation to the Code of Conduct. This letter also suggested that the Monitoring Officer would welcome interest by parish councils in attending any training were it to be organised this winter. This letter has prompted 3 approaches from parish councils and the Chairman and Monitoring Officer will be attending meetings at Abbots Ripton, Little Paxton and Grafham Parish Councils over the next few weeks.
- 2.5 The Committee had recommended the Monitoring Officer to arrange for the Clerk and Members of Old Hurst Parish Council to receive training on the Code of Conduct. This took place on 3rd November 2005 and comprised a presentation by the Monitoring Officer, an opportunity for questions and a review of a case scenario. The Chairman of the Committee was present. Given the special circumstances, the session lasted approximately 1½ hours and appeared to be well received.
- 2.6 The Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils has suggested on a number of occasions that it would be of benefit to all Cambridgeshire Authorities to establish a Cambridgeshire Standards Forum to share both experiences of Code of Conduct issues and the burden of training. Whilst Huntingdonshire has taken the view that CALC would be welcome to participate in training sessions organised for parish councils and indeed invitations are always sent to them, the Monitoring Officer needs to retain responsibility for training bearing in mind the duties and responsibilities of the Local Government Act 2000. Currently South Cambridgeshire District Council are pursuing this initiative on behalf of CALC.
- 2.7 Since March attempts to convene a Standards Committee Network for Cambridgeshire have been made by Fenland District Council and the first meeting of this Forum is scheduled to take place on 5th December 2005. Items on the agenda for this inaugural meeting relate to training of Standards Committee Members and Council Members/joint training opportunities and relationships with town and parish councils. The Chairman and a representative of the Monitoring Officer will be attending this meeting on behalf of the Committee and given the expectation that the other authorities in Cambridgeshire will be represented this may present an opportunity to learn and share experiences in this field.

3. THE WAY FORWARD?

3.1 Taking up the suggestions made by Members at the last meeting and building these into the current approach to training, it is proposed that training/guidance for town and parish councils be structured as follows -

- ◆ training offered to all newly appointed Councillors (and Clerks) following elections in May;
- ◆ refresher training offered to existing Councillors/Clerks in September;
- ◆ Code of Conduct guidance compiled (as a pack) for issue to all newly appointed Clerks when appointments notified to the Head of Administration;
- ◆ town and parish councils to be reminded that the Monitoring Officer and his colleagues are available to attend meetings and to give advice when required on an ongoing basis;
- ◆ training sessions to take no longer than 1¹/₂ hours and to comprise a presentation, case review and showing of Standards Board for England video;
- ◆ a certificate of achievement to be offered to those participating in training sessions – example enclosed;
- ◆ the Chairman, Vice-Chairman or another Member of the Standards Committee and a parish council representative to be present at all training sessions hosted by the Monitoring Officer;
- ◆ CALC also to be invited to participate;
- ◆ town and parish councils to be reminded of the availability of information on Standards and Conduct on the District Councils website;
- ◆ a link to the publication (Town and Parish Standard) published twice yearly by the Standards Board for England to be accessible via the District Council's website and enclosed with copies of the Committees agenda when sent to all town and parish councils; and
- ◆ participation by the Committee, Monitoring Officer and/or his staff in any joint training organised by Cambridgeshire Authorities.

3.2 One of the Committee's suggestions, at their last meeting, related to the compilation of a database to maintain a record of those Councils/Councillors who had undergone Code of Conduct training. A database for this purpose has been in place since the commencement of the ethical standards regime as well as one which monitors the current status of each parish in terms of their membership and their return registration information.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Members will note that steps are being taken in the County to improve the approach taken by authorities towards ethical standards and the Code of Conduct. Huntingdonshire can only gain from participation in these Forums.

- 4.2 From observation thus far, it would appear that the District Council's commitment of time and resources to training of town and parish councils compares favourably with neighbouring authorities. However, given recent experience at Old Hurst, the more structured approach to training outlined in paragraph 3.1 above hopefully will extend, improve and refresh awareness of the requirements of the Code of Conduct.
- 4.3 Members are invited to note this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2005.

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