

Maidstone Borough Council
Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

23 April 2014

Member Development Needs

Report of: Christian Scade, Senior Corporate Policy Officer

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview and Scrutiny requires a number of skills and the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, in its report (April, 2013) to Council on the Cabinet and Enhanced Scrutiny Model made the following recommendations:

- "The development needs for scrutiny and an appropriate programme be developed by the Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and the Scrutiny Team. This could include an annual event with other Councils and use of Parliamentary Outreach support."
- "Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee should identify development needs at the beginning of the year and then on a quarterly basis via the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee"

1.2 Following discussion at the last meeting, this is an opportunity for the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, to provide feedback on the updated Centre for Public Scrutiny activity, attached at **Appendix A**, and to identify any additional training needs for Overview and Scrutiny.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the Committee:

- (a) Consider, and provide feedback, on the updated Centre for Public Scrutiny activity attached at **Appendix A**;
- (b) Identify any additional training needs or development areas for Overview and Scrutiny (including for newly elected Members).

3. Background to recommendations

3.1 Maidstone Borough Council is committed to providing an effective and efficient service to the residents and businesses of and visitors to the Borough. The council recognises the importance of learning and development in supporting all councillors in undertaking their roles in the community and within the council.

3.2 In July 2013, the Member and Employment and Development Panel agreed the revised Member Development Policy, which provides a framework to enable the Council to manage its member development activities for elected members in a coherent and systemic way. This is attached at **Appendix B** for information.

4. Scrutiny Skills

4.1 A number of skills have been identified for Scrutiny Committee Members and these are listed in the Members' Overview and Scrutiny Handbook.

4.2 The list below should be used to identify any training needs or development areas. These can be addressed through formal training, one-to-one sessions or mentoring; many, however will be developed through experience.

Skills for Scrutiny Members

- adapted from the LGiU Scrutiny Checklist, 2003

- Taking evidence from a wide range of people, interviewing, questioning and listening skills
- Understanding and using
 - Performance management information
 - Other data and findings from research
 - Information from inspections
- Understanding of the policy framework, skills to review implications of policy framework
- Developing recommendations, negotiating a report across parties and handling minority reports/vies
- Digesting and understanding paperwork and electronic information
- Communication skills
 - Presentation and public speaking
 - Reporting, possibly report writing
- Influencing Skills
- Monitoring implementation of recommendations
- Evaluation skills

4.3 In addition, the skills below have been identified as necessary for Scrutiny Chairmen:

Skills for Scrutiny Chairmen

– adapted from the LGiU Scrutiny Checklist, 2003

- Leadership and project management skills
- Planning and managing a busy workload
- Ability to identify topics of public interest for review
- Ability to work with officers
- Chairing meetings of different types, from steering a formal agenda to facilitating an informal group to holding a public consultation session
- Champion Scrutiny both internally and externally
- Dealing with the media

5. Member Development Activities

- 5.1 Following the recommendations that were made in relation to the Cabinet and Enhanced Scrutiny Model, listed in par 1.1 above, and the implementation of the revised Member Development Policy, the Policy and Information Team have been working with the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Parliamentary Outreach Service on two development activities.

Questioning Skills

- 5.2 Representatives from the Parliamentary Outreach Service facilitated a Questioning / Challenging skills session on the 29 January, 2014. The workshop covered the following issues –

- Preparing for scrutiny meetings
- Questioning skills
- Tools for interpreting information

- 5.3 Feedback from the session has been positive and will be used to develop future activities.

Building Relationships Between Cabinet and Scrutiny

- 5.4 At the last meeting the Committee considered a draft development activity that had been prepared by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.
- 5.5 Members of the Committee agreed that the session should be re-written to ensure a clear focus on building relationships between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. It was also agreed that the session should be interactive and tailored to meet the particular needs of Maidstone Borough Council.

- 5.6 In view of this feedback, Jessica Crowe, Executive Director, Centre for Public Scrutiny, has suggested a revised approach. The outline of the session is attached at **Appendix A** for comment.

6. Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 6.1 Member Development underpins the work of the council in all the democratic processes and is critical to ensure that Members are properly supported to undertake their role.

7. Other Implications

- 7.1 The council has agreed a budget for Member Development.
- 7.2 In addition to meeting the individual training needs of elected members, the budget will be used to provide across the board training for all councillors on Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 7.3 There are financial implications of either increased or reduced provision, but the Member Development Policy would operate within existing budgets.
- 7.4 There are staffing implications because the development of scrutiny training activities is provided by officers. An increase in member participation would make better use of their time.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1 None.