
Report of Chief Planning Officer

Report to Joint Plans Panel

Date: 11 September 2014

Subject: Member training

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	☐ Yes	☒ No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	☐ Yes	☒ No

Summary of main issues

1. The Council has organised a compulsory programme of learning and development for members on regulatory panels for a number of years. Members once appointed to the Plans Panel must attend the training in order for them to sit on the panel, as described in Article 8 and 8A of the Council's Constitution.
2. Acting on feedback from members on the format and delivery of training sessions and working through the Member Development Working Group has resulted in a responsive programme of events, which meets member needs.
3. In 2013-14, in addition to the compulsory training, the programme comprised extra training and development opportunities which members were advised to attend, as they provided further information to members to enable them to discharge their duties correctly.
4. This report looks back at the opportunities presented in 2013-14 as well as describing development proposals for 2014-15.

Recommendations

5. Members are recommended to note the report and comment as they feel appropriate.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report reflects on the training opportunities for member in 2013-14 and provides a look ahead for member training for 2014-15. The report is presented for information.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The importance of planning training for members has been consistently highlighted in a number of national reviews and reports on the planning system over recent years, most recently in the Local Government Association, Probity in Planning¹ report : *The LGA endorses the good practise of many councils which ensures that their Members receive training on the planning process when first serving on the planning committee. It also recommends that Members be updated regularly on changes to legislation or procedures. Such training is essential for those members involved in making decisions on planning applications and on local development documents. Authorities should provide training on the planning process for all members.*
- 2.2 Compulsory training for members who sit on the Plans Panel has been a feature of the council's constitution for a number of years. Members support the principle that to ensure good, robust, transparent and effective decision making, members should undertake appropriate training.
- 2.3 The programme of prescribed member training was agreed by the Joint Plans Panel in June 2013 and formally approved by Member Management Committee in November 2013. This programme sets out the format, frequency and level of training that is required. The Member Development Working Group, a cross party group, is responsible for making all member development decisions.

3 Main Issues

3.1 Compulsory training

- 3.1.1 Upon appointment to the Plans Panel, members new to the Panel are required to undergo a briefing session from a senior planning officer in order for them to be able to sit on the panel. This training usually takes place after the AGM in May and before the first round of committee meetings in early June. This is in accordance with Articles 8 and 8A of the Council's Constitution. This comprehensive briefing covers the basics of the operation of the panel meeting, sound decision making as well as specific information on planning issues including the National Planning Policy Framework and is delivered by the Area and deputy Area Planning Managers. Each member is given a pack of relevant information for reference. This year there were nine changes to the Panel from the previous year, including two new Chairs and all members new to the Panels received this training.

¹ Local Government Association Probity in Planning 2009, revised 2013

- 3.1.2 Members who had previously sat on the Panel, but who had not been on Panel for some time were also offered the one to one session as a refresher, although this was not a compulsory requirement.
- 3.1.3 In September 2013, the compulsory planning and licencing training took place - the "autumn update", with a repeated session in November 2013 for members unable to attend the first session. This session was attended by new members to Panel and established Panel members. All members have undertaken this training in 2013-14.
- 3.1.4 In previous years this training was delivered by external training consultants, however in responding to feedback from members, in 2013-14 it was decided that the training should be delivered in-house by the section head, development and regulatory and the head of planning services. This approach allowed for more of a Leeds focussed session which interpreted and applied national policy to local circumstances. This method of delivery received very positive feedback from members and will be replicated in 2014-15. The dates for the compulsory training are 29 October, 10-12 and 6 November, 2-4pm.

3.2 Other training

- 3.2.1 In 2013-14, there have also been a number of other training opportunities offered to members; these were over and above the compulsory sessions and were advisable rather than mandatory:
- June 2013, joint licensing and planning seminar to look at the two different regimes and consider how the decision making in both regimes can support the aims and objectives of the other.
 - June 2013, planning session facilitated by Dr Hugh Ellis, Head of Policy at the Town and Country Planning Association. This session provided an update on the planning reform agenda, including the outcome of the Growth and Infrastructure Act and explored some of the key challenges and opportunities facing the Leeds City Region in achieving long term sustainable development.
 - March 2014, *Effective decision making for planning and licencing members*. Two sessions on the council's protocol to allow third party recording of committee meetings. This was provided in response to new government legislation.
 - October 2014, RTPI course *Planning and the Public Interest*, all members have been offered the opportunity to attend this conference. So far, one member has been booked to attend.
- 3.2.2 Shadowing of planning officers by members in the planning office was offered in 2013-14. This allowed members to see the planning process from the beginning and the steps taken towards making a recommendation and decision. The shadowing was taken up by a number of members and was well received, with members reporting a greater insight into how the whole process works. It is anticipated that shadowing will be offered again in 2014-15.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The annual training proposals are subject to consultation with the Member Development Working Group, Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services and the overall approach has previously been endorsed by the Joint Plans Panel.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 There are no specific issues.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 Article 8 and 8A of the Council's Constitution states that members of the Plans Panel and Licensing Committee must complete all compulsory training and not sit as a member unless such training has been undertaken in accordance with the Council's prescribed training programme.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The prescribed training will take place within existing budgets, utilising existing staff resources and expertise.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 It is essential for the sake of transparency and robust decision making that sufficient member training takes place in order for members to be able to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 The Council may be subject to challenge if it is unable to demonstrate that sufficient training has been provided to regulatory members in order for them to be able to undertake their duties effectively.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Members have recognised the need for training to support them in their role on the plans panel and assist them make robust and transparent decisions. The prescribed training programme as agreed by Joint Plans Panel and endorsed by Member Management Committee has been running successfully for the last couple of years, and particularly since the in-house sessions have been offered, which are bespoke to Leeds. The compulsory training is augmented by other training opportunities, which are advisable, but not part of the compulsory training required for a member to sit on a Panel.
- 5.2 The Council in demonstrating that all members of its regulatory committees are up to date with the most current information available, manages the risk of procedural challenge or challenge on the grounds that members have not received sufficient appropriate training to allow them to discharge their duties correctly.

- 5.3 Members will be offered shadowing opportunities by planning officers and members are encouraged to take up these opportunities, as feedback from members who have taken up this offer have said it has provided a valuable insight into the overall determination process.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are recommended to note the report and comment as they feel appropriate.

7 Background documents²

² The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.