

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6th December 2016

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP - PROPOSALS

Chair of Scrutiny Group	Councillor Tom Baker-Price
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Ward(s) Affected	No specific ward relevance.
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Performance scrutiny is a key responsibility of the Overview and Scrutiny process and represents national best practice. The introduction of the Council's dashboard, which provides data in respect of the local authority's strategic and operational service measures, has provided Members with an opportunity to revisit performance scrutiny in more detail. In this context the Performance Scrutiny Working Group was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the start of the 2016/17 municipal year to scrutinise the content of the dashboard and the implications for service performance.
- 1.2 The Performance Scrutiny Working Group will review a range of matters which may vary between meetings. Where recommendations are made at a meeting about a particular subject these will be recorded in a report and presented for Members' consideration at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.3 This report details two recommendations made in respect of Members' attendance at training sessions and the recording of public Committee meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND to the Member Support Steering Group that a measure should be introduced on the corporate dashboard monitoring Members' attendance at training sessions;

to RECOMMEND to the Executive Committee that the Council should trial the broadcasting of Council meetings with a view to permanent arrangements being made to broadcast appropriate meetings in future;

and to RESOLVE that the report be noted.

3. KEY ISSUES

Background

- 3.1 The Performance Scrutiny Working Group at its meeting on 10th October 2016 invited the Democratic Services Manager to attend to discuss Members' attendance at training sessions and at Committee meetings.

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- 3.2 Members of the group had observed fluctuations in attendance at training sessions in recent months. Attendance remained relatively high for some areas; for example 12 Members attended Overview and Scrutiny training in June 2016. However, attendance at other training sessions has declined as demonstrated by the following examples:
- Data Protection training in June 2016 was attended by one Councillor.
 - Safeguarding and prevent training in June 2016 was attended by five Members.
 - The Statement of Accounts Briefing in September was attended by five Councillors.
- 3.3 Attendance at training does need to be placed in context. Some training is mandatory, such as specific training for Members of the Planning Committee as well as Members who may act as substitutes on this Committee. However, training is not required for every Committee; non-executive Members do not have to be trained in order to serve on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.4 The content and length of the training may also determine whether Members participate in scheduled training activities. Training providers are encouraged to deliver interesting and succinct training which focuses on salient points. However, in some cases Members may not feel that previous training sessions have been particularly engaging and this may deter attendance at future sessions.
- 3.5 As with any activity training may be scheduled on a date which conflicts with other commitments that a Councillor may have, such as work or annual leave and this can impact on attendance levels. In addition, Redditch Borough Council has an electoral system whereby one third of Members' seats are up for election in three years out of every four. The group recognises that Members towards the end of their municipal term of office may have attended training at an earlier date and therefore may not need to attend sessions delivered on a routine basis in later years.
- 3.6 However, the Performance Scrutiny Working Group is contending that even in this context the number of Members attending training sessions should ideally be higher than current levels. The group agrees that participation in training is important as it helps Members to develop the skills needed to support local residents and to participate constructively in Committee processes.
- 3.7 The Council's corporate dashboard measures service performance in particular areas. Members of the working group believe that a measure dedicated to attendance at Councillors' training sessions would be a suitable subject for a measure on the dashboard. Comments can be added to the visual chart that would be created for this measure to help clarify whether the training was mandatory or targeted at a particular group of Councillors. Such comments could also be used to

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help explain other reasons why attendance levels might have been low for a particular session. Individual Members would not need to be identified.

- 3.8 The data provided in this measure could be used by the Member Support Steering Group (MSSG) to monitor attendance at training events over time. The MSSG is the working group responsible for member development issues. If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees to endorse the group's proposal in respect of Member training this will need to be referred to the MSSG for determination.
- 3.9 During the meeting of the group on 10th October Members also enquired about the potential for Committee meetings to be broadcast and made accessible to the public via the Council's website. Neighbouring authorities at Birmingham City Council, Worcestershire County Council, Wychavon District Council and Wyre Forest District Council all broadcast Committee meetings, either using web casting or audio equipment. Some of these authorities broadcast all public Committee meetings whilst other Councils broadcast meetings identified as being of interest to the public.
- 3.10 At present Redditch Borough Council does not broadcast Committee meetings. However the group recognises that there is often significant public interest in the work of particular Committees, especially the Planning Committee and Council. There are some residents who may not be able to attend Committee meetings due to other commitments or to having mobility problems who might be interested in items on the agenda.
- 3.11 Minutes are taken at Committee meetings but, in line with best practice, these provide a record of the proceedings rather than a verbatim account. A recording, either audio or visual, available to access from the Council's website, would help to provide residents with access to more information about proceedings at these meetings.
- 3.12 In this context the group is proposing that consideration should be given to undertaking a trial to broadcast particular Council meetings with a view to introducing permanent broadcasting arrangements in future. As part of the trial an opportunity would be provided to explore broadcasting arrangements that best meet the needs of Redditch residents. The group envisage that any Committee meeting open to the public, not just full Council, could be recorded as part of this trial.
- 3.13 At the end of the process the group propose that the outcomes of the trial would be evaluated and reported for consideration of the Executive Committee. Subject to these outcomes the Executive Committee may subsequently choose to broadcast all or some Committee meetings or may conclude that broadcasting is not required in future at the Council's Committee meetings.

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Financial Implications

- 3.14 Democratic Services Officers already record Members' attendance at training sessions. The additional requirement to upload data in respect of attendance for a measure on the dashboard would simply entail the costs of Officer time.
- 3.15 The Council does sometimes arrange for external organisations to deliver training to Members. Generally the Council pays those organisations to deliver the training. A higher turnout at such sessions helps to secure value for money, though the financial implications can also be minimised through working in partnership with neighbouring local authorities to share the costs, an approach which is already in place.
- 3.16 The group has been advised that the costs involved in recording Committee meetings would vary depending on the option selected by the Council for this purpose. There are some web casting and audio recording companies that charge the Council for hosting broadcasts. There is also the option for a local authority to negotiate to pay some organisations on a meeting by meeting basis, with broadcasts arranged in cases where significant public interest is anticipated.
- 3.17 Members of the group have highlighted that social media might be used which has no direct cost. In order to minimise the financial costs to the Council involved in broadcasting Committee meetings Members are suggesting that this option should be investigated further during the suggested trial. However, Members have been advised that the audibility of some recordings provided using this can be limited in some cases and therefore might not meet the needs of the public.

Legal Implications

- 3.18 From time to time Members are required to consider confidential information which is considered exempt in line with legislation detailed in Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the Local Government Act 1972. The Committee is asked to note that it would not be appropriate to record Members' debates during consideration of such items and this would need to be clarified with interested stakeholders if the Council decides to record meetings in the future.
- 3.19 If the Council agrees at the end of the trial to introduce permanent broadcasting arrangements consideration will need to be given to the procurement implications. Officers will need to ensure that procurement rules are followed where applicable.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.20 Democratic Services already maintain a record of Members' attendance at training sessions. The provision of this data in a bespoke measure would not require significant additional work and therefore there would be capacity within the team to update this information on the dashboard.

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- 3.21 The introduction of broadcasting arrangements at Committee meetings could potentially have implications for the Democratic Services team. Depending on the form of broadcasting selected by the Council time might be required from Officers to set up and maintain equipment during meetings. Sufficient time would also be needed to upload broadcast material onto the Council's website.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.22 The Democratic Services team, in liaison with the MSSG, aims to ensure that the training that is delivered to Councillors is informative, engaging and useful. Any suggestions from Members about action that could be taken to improve the training provided would be welcomed.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 There is a risk that if Members are not properly trained they will be unable to fulfil their responsibilities either as community leaders or in their roles on particular Committees.
- 4.2 There is also a risk that if Members are not appropriately trained they will not have the skills needed to make necessary decisions and this could contribute to reputational damage for the Council.
- 4.3 If a trial of broadcasting meetings is undertaken successfully there is a risk of raising expectations about it becoming a permanent arrangement which may not be affordable depending on the approach taken.

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