

SELECTION & CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

9TH DECEMBER 2014

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE MEMBER TRAINING PANEL

The report of the Chairman of the Member Training Panel meeting of 18th August 2014 was considered by Cabinet on the 9th October (original report attached at Appendix A). Some Cabinet Members expressed concern about two of the recommendations (namely **ii** and **vi**) and the Cabinet agreed to refer the recommendations to the Selection & Constitutional Review Committee. For information the full recommendations in question were: -

- (ii) ***information on “Being a Good Councillor” and the particular expectations and requirements at Ashford, should be delivered before the Election in the form of a talk from the Chief Executive and/or an experienced Member at the prospective candidates evening in the spring, but also by way of an ‘Ashford Centric’ document covering the relevant points outlined within the report which could be given out with nomination packs. This to be produced following agreement from the Group Leaders.***
- (vi) ***Members attendance figures for meetings and training sessions should be published as part of the annual allowances notice.***

The recommendations have subsequently been re-examined and discussed with the Chairman of the Member Training Panel with the following observations: -

Recommendation (ii)

There was concern expressed about the production of a “Being a Good Councillor” document as it could be too prescriptive in terms of what constituted a good Councillor and that each Political Group had its own sanctions in terms of concerns over performance. This point is accepted and the proposed name of the document is perhaps a little too ‘inflammatory’. This was certainly not the intention of the Panel’s original recommendation. To better reflect what was intended it is proposed to change the name of the document to “*What to Expect as an Ashford Councillor*”. Furthermore, by way of explanation, the purpose of the document was that the Panel had discussed how prospective candidates did not always realise the level of work required to be undertaken by an Elected Member. Its intention was to produce some sort of concise, professional, Ashford-centric document to assist prospective candidates, giving them an idea of what to expect as an Ashford Borough Councillor, rather than being too prescriptive. It was proposed that its content would be subject to agreement from the Group Leaders before being distributed and provided to prospective candidates with nomination packs. Whilst noting the proposed new name of the document to better reflect its intention, if Members would prefer not to pursue this route, this Committee can obviously reject or amend recommendation (ii).

Recommendation (vi)

Concern was also expressed about the recommendation proposing the publication of Member's attendance figures, as meeting attendance could give a distorted picture of the overall work undertaken by an individual Member. Again, by way of explanation, this recommendation stemmed from discussion at the Panel and from the work of the Councillor Conduct Group who were both concerned at the level of non-attendance at meetings by some Councillors. It was also made with the knowledge that many other District Councils in Kent as well as Kent County Council already publish Members' attendance figures, on an ongoing basis and in great detail, on their own websites. The recommendation had been to consider publishing attendance figures as part of the Annual Allowances notice which appears on the Council's website and that it be expressed for each Member as a percentage of their attendance at meetings to which they had been appointed to, so it would be a figure with context and meaning. Whilst it is accepted that this point is not strictly a training issue, it is considered important by the Members involved in making the recommendation, and the publication of Members' attendance at training sessions/events was something that the Panel itself would like to pursue. However, if Selection & Constitutional Review would prefer to reject this proposed recommendation, again that is the option of this Committee.

Conclusion

The Member Training Panel would still like to put forward the following recommendations: -

Recommendations and Next Steps:

That: -

- (i) the Panel support the content of the report and the direction proposed for Member Training and Induction.**
- (ii) information on the particular expectations and requirements of an Ashford Councillor, should be given before the Election in the form of a talk from the Chief Executive and/or an experienced Member at the prospective candidates evening in the spring, but also by way of an 'Ashford Centric' document covering the relevant points outlined within the report which could be given out with nomination packs. This to be produced following agreement from the Group Leaders.**
- (iii) at the first meeting of each Committee, Task Group etc. following the Election, the first Agenda item should be an introduction to that Committee and an explanation of what it is there to do.**

- (iv) reports from external training sessions should continue to be produced and circulated, but this should be via the Chairman of the Member Training Panel.**
- (v) an on-line training portal for Members be devised.**
- (vi) Members attendance figures for meetings and training sessions should be published as part of the annual allowances notice.**
- (vii) Group Leaders be asked for their continued support for the proposed programme and to encourage their new and existing Members to attend induction and training sessions.**

Ashford Borough Council

Report of the Chairman of the Member Training Panel – 18th August 2014

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A meeting of the Member Training Panel was held on the 18th August 2014. The Members present were:-

Councillor Miss Martin (Chairman);
Councillor Mortimer (Vice-Chairman);
Councillors Chilton, Davidson, Mrs Dyer, Hicks.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Davidson attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Adby.

Apologies: -

Councillors Adby, Claughton, Smith.

Also Present:-

Danny Sheppard - Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

2 Chairman's Report – 15th April 2014

2.1 Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

3 Members Training – The Way Forward

- 3.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone present. She explained that this was her first Meeting as Chairman of the Panel. She had worked with the Vice-Chairman and the Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer to produce the contents of the report and she was pleased to present it to the Panel. The report demonstrated a new approach to the whole issue of Member training and Councillor Development more generally. This was primarily with a view to post the May 2015 Elections, and she said she would welcome the input of the Panel to take that forward. She said that she had sent out an email to all Members asking for feedback on training and there had been a very good response which she was grateful for. The responses had helped shape the report and recommendations put to this meeting and had therefore served as a useful starting point.

- 3.2 The Chairman opened the report up to the Panel for general comments and questions. The following points were made: -

- Whilst the Panel supported the requirement for Members to submit a short report following attendance at an external training session, concern was expressed about a recent example whereby a Member had submitted the paperwork from a session, only for it to be inferred

that they were biased on the issue of the session itself and having the paperwork circulated outside of the Council. It was considered that this may put other Members off attending training sessions. The Panel thought this was an unfortunate example and the message needed to be made clear that the views from any of these training sessions were not the personal opinion of the Member and should certainly not be passed on outside of the Council. However, the intention of the requirement was to disseminate knowledge from these courses to all Members, and that intention should not be lost. It was agreed that in the future such reports should be submitted via the Chairman of this Panel rather than the individual Member to avoid confusion, but the requirement to submit a report did still stand.

- The Panel was very supportive of the suggestion that at the first meeting of each Committee, Task Group etc. following the elections, the first Agenda item should be an introduction to the Committee and an explanation of what it was there to do.
- The introduction of an on-line training portal for Members was also strongly supported. The Chairman would discuss this with the Portfolio Holder and IT Officers and report back to the next meeting of the Panel.
- As well of the importance of getting Group Leader 'buy-in' it would also be important to get the message across to Election Agents so that the importance of induction training was re-enforced to prospective candidates. The agreed dates for sessions in the Induction Programme should be sent to Agents when produced, with a note emphasising the importance of these dates to prospective Councillors.
- The Panel believed that the information on 'Being a Good Councillor' should be delivered before the Election so that all candidates knew what was expected at Ashford and were under no illusions of the requirements and expectations of the role. This could take the form of a talk from the Chief Executive and/or an experienced Member at the prospective candidates evening in the spring, but perhaps more useful would be the production of some sort of professional 'Ashford Centric' document covering the bullet points outlined in the report, but also outlining Ashford's particular expectations of its Members as well as the things that were available to help them in their role. This could be given out with nomination packs, but would clearly need Group Leader endorsement and sign off before it was circulated. A Member said his Group had drawn up a 'candidate contract' which he would be happy to provide to Officers as an example. The Panel was keen to stress that although they were strictly volunteers, Councillors also had to be accountable as they were given an allowance and had been elected by their constituents. The basic outline of the 'Being a Good Councillor' document would be presented to the next meeting of this Panel for discussion.
- Although not strictly a training issue, further to the previous meeting of the Panel the issue of Members' attendance at meetings was raised. Following discussion it was suggested that a recommendation be made to consider publishing Members' attendance figures as part of the annual allowances notice. This would have to be taken in context

though, in terms of how many meetings a Member was expected to attend by virtue of their membership of Committees etc. If adopted, this could perhaps be extended to publishing attendance at training sessions.

- The importance being placed on ongoing training and refresher sessions on changing legislation and emerging issues was welcomed. It was accepted that in the past enough onus had not been placed on refreshing existing Councillors and this would be extremely important in the light of Localism and the ever-changing landscape of Local Government.
- A Member said that it was difficult to keep track of the sheer number of Task Groups or similar that had emerged over the last three years and an explanation of these and all new emerging Task Groups should be provided to Members.
- Difficulties of scheduling ad-hoc meetings, particularly with the Task Groups, was raised and it was suggested that each of the Task Groups should fix monthly dates for their meetings in advance and if dates were not needed it would be much easier to delete them than the other way round. It was considered that this would help everyone with scheduling.
- A buddying system may be useful, but it was not clear how that would work in practice. The Panel thought this was something that should be undertaken more informally or within Political Groups. The Chairman advised that the LGA ran an independent mentoring/buddying system with experienced Members around the country, which she had personally signed up to. This was something Members could explore individually if they wished, and she had found it useful in terms of discussing more general issues.
- There were issues around the budget, which was currently £15,000 over the four year life of the Council, and whether the new more pro-active approach would result in a need to increase this. The Panel considered this would be a price worth paying for more informed and better trained Members and this may be something that needed exploring at future meetings. More detailed suggestions on the budget will be made to Cabinet following the next meeting of the Panel, but it is expected that it would be likely to need somewhere in the region of a doubling of the existing £15,000 budget.

3.3 The Panel ran through the sessions suggested as part of the Induction Programme and made the following comments: -

- The Panel agreed that the following sessions should take place during Phase 1 of the Induction Programme: -
 - First ABC Induction Session;
 - Planning Committee Training;
 - Licensing Committee Training;
 - Audit Committee Training;
 - An Introduction to Overview & Scrutiny.

- Each Committee would also have an introduction to the Committee and explanation of what it was there to do as its first Agenda item of the first meeting.
- The Panel agreed that the four topics suggested for Phase 2 of the Induction Programme in the report all merited their own sessions, therefore Phase 2 should include: -
 - Finance; Housing;
 - Culture & the Environment;
 - IT/Social Media/Press & Communications.
- The importance of attending training sessions, and the availability of a training budget and ability to attend external courses should be added to the list of issues covered at the first ABC Induction Session, including an explanation of the application process. The Panel considered that greater weighting for external training opportunities should be given for those councillors that embrace the internal training on offer at ABC

3.4 The Chairman advised that she had been working with the IT department and the Portfolio Holder around options for Members to have their own websites. It was also expected that all 43 Members would be provided with standard IT kit to assist with support levels. The initial idea around the websites was to supply a template which could be automatically set up for all 43 Members if they so wished, with a generic layout and information supplied, but with the ability for Members to personalise parts of the page with their own details and Ward news. It would allow residents to differentiate between the standard ABC website (for information gathering etc.) and the Councillor websites which would give Members a better opportunity to communicate with their constituents, whilst also giving out key Council information. The websites would obviously have to be non-political. They were looking to start a pilot of this involving the Leader and the Chairman said she would report back further on the issue at the next meeting of the Panel. She said that she thought the whole issue of Councillors being able to better communicate with their constituents via the internet and social media was vitally important and relevant IT training sessions and sessions on how to use the websites and IT kit would therefore have to be a key issue for the new Council and built in to the Induction Programme.

3.5 **Post Meeting Note: The Chairman will be attending some specialist Social Media training on behalf of the Council on 23rd September and a Code of Conduct for Social Media use for Councillors is being devised. Further information on these will be distributed in the run-up to the Elections as use of Social Media is expected to be a topical issue in the campaigning.**

3.6 The Chairman said she would like to draw attention to the upcoming Members Tour of Completed Development on the 7th October. She said this would be an invaluable day for all Members and she hoped that Panel Members in particular would support it, and other similar events, to show their commitment to Member Training.

3.7 Recommendations and Next Steps:

That: -

- (i) the Panel support the content of the report and the direction proposed for Member Training and Induction.**
- (ii) information on 'Being a Good Councillor' and the particular expectations and requirements at Ashford, should be delivered before the Election in the form of a talk from the Chief Executive and/or an experienced Member at the prospective candidates evening in the spring, but also by way of an 'Ashford Centric' document covering the relevant points outlined within the report which could be given out with nomination packs. This to be produced following agreement from the Group Leaders.**
- (iii) at the first meeting of each Committee, Task Group etc. following the Election, the first Agenda item should be an introduction to that Committee and an explanation of what it is there to do.**
- (iv) reports from external training sessions should continue to be produced and circulated, but this should be via the Chairman of the Member Training Panel.**
- (v) an on-line training portal for Members be devised.**
- (vi) Members attendance figures for meetings and training sessions should be published as part of the annual allowances notice.**
- (vii) Group Leaders be asked for their continued support for the proposed programme and to encourage their new and existing Members to attend induction and training sessions.**

4 Dates of Future Meetings

- 4.1 The Chairman advised that there would be two more meetings of the Panel before the Elections. Once in November to agree a draft 'Being a Good Councillor document', a timetable for the Induction Programme - putting dates to sessions and fleshing out some more of the details, and again in March 2015 to finalise the arrangements and the Panel's Annual Report for 2014/15. The following dates were agreed: -

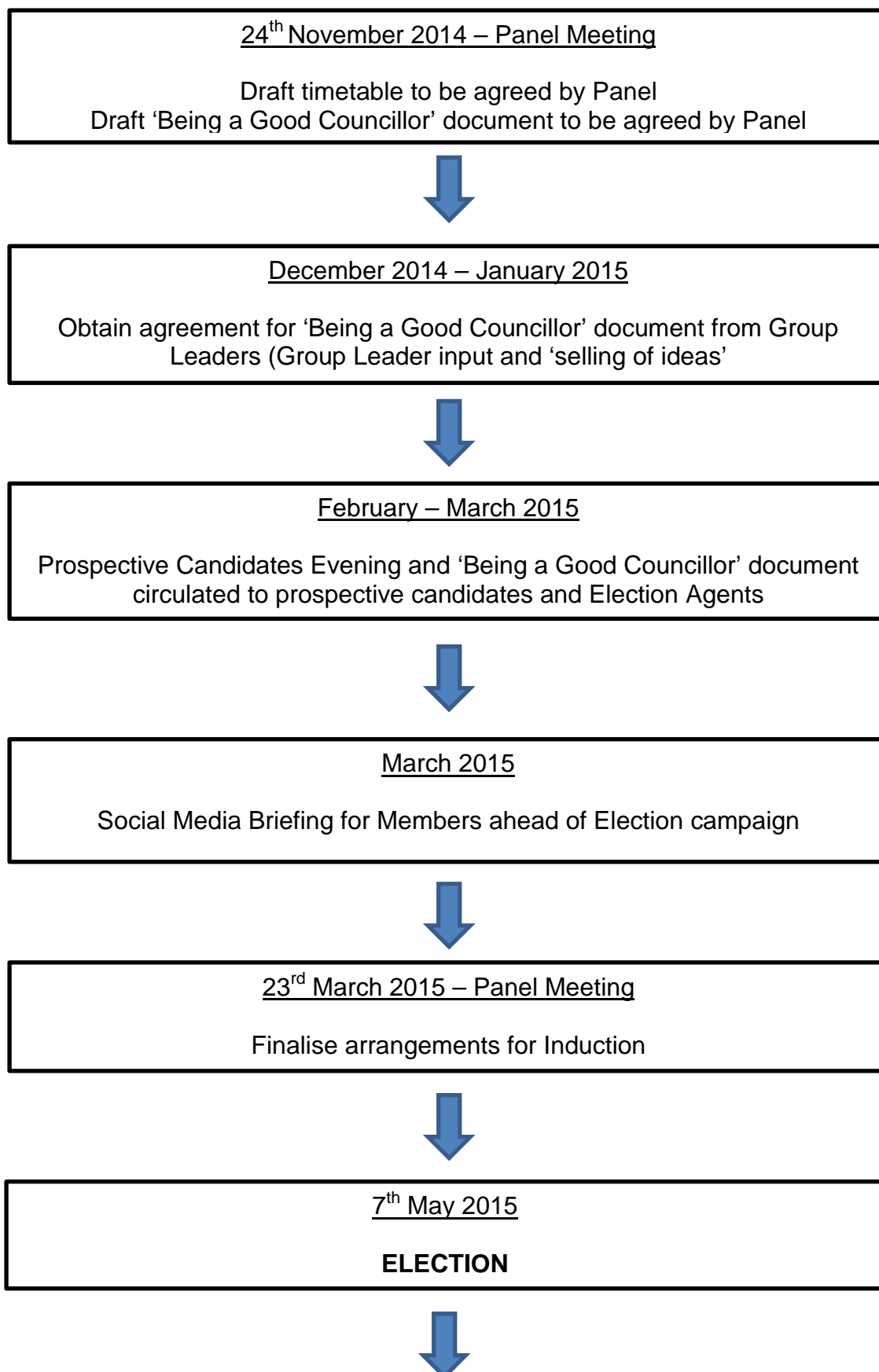
- Monday 24th November 2014 – 10am – Committee Room 1.
- Monday 23rd March 2015 – 10am – Committee Room 1.

Councillor Miss J Martin
Chairman – Member Training Panel

MINS:Member Training Panel 18-08-14

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard
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MEMBERS TRAINING – THE WAY FORWARD



8th May 2015

Count – Introduction to Member Services team and distribution of key materials



May – July 2015

Delivery of Phase 1 of Induction

(First ABC Induction Session; Planning Committee Training; Licensing Committee Training; Audit Committee Training; An Introduction to Overview & Scrutiny)



Summer 2015

IT Specific Training (New Kit, New Websites?)



August – October 2015

Delivery of Phase 2 of Induction

(Finance; Housing; Culture & the Environment; IT/Social Media/Press & Communications.)



November 2015 and onwards

Ongoing Training – Specialist and Refresher