
Date: 17 July 2015

To: Linda McDonald
Charlotte Taylor
SSC Manager (HR, OD & Payments)
Corporate Officer (Equalities and
Organisational Development)

Cc: Andy O'Brien
Chief Executive

From: Tim Ridout
Chief Auditor

Re: **Internal Audit Review 2015/16 – Council member Induction**

Dear Linda and Charlotte

In accordance with the programme of Internal Audit work agreed by the Audit Committee for 2015/16, CW Audit has undertaken a review of the Council's arrangements for induction training for councillors elected at the May 2015 elections. This letter sets out the outcome of our review.

Background

The effectiveness of member induction was a matter requested by management to be considered in the internal audit plan, to provide assurance on the revised arrangements following considerable investment of officer and member time during 2014/15 aimed at developing the arrangements further in relation to the 2015 induction process. This recognises the important role of members in forming and scrutinising policy and holding management to account, in representing their constituents at a local and Borough level, and the expectations upon them in relation to matters such as their conduct but also the range of matters for which they may be responsible or with which they may be involved as an elected member.

A Councillor Induction Working Group was formed and met on a number of occasions during 2014 to consider the previous induction process, members needs, and suitable means of addressing these as effectively as possible for 2015. The Group consisted of several members, representing the different political groups, supported by the Chief Executive and the Corporate Officer (Equalities and Organisational Development).

Risk Assessment

As well as helping to support the Council in considering further its approach to member induction and development, the review aims to provide assurance in relation to the following risk:

- That the Council fails, or is perceived to fail, to ensure elected members are suitably made aware of, and trained in, key areas to help ensure they are able to effectively carry out their role.

Scope and coverage

Our engagement letter, issued in June 2015, set out that “through a process of benchmarking the Council’s arrangements for the induction of members elected at the 2015 Borough election, against good practices for member induction set out in the Local Government Association’s Leadership Centre for Local Government’s document “The 21st Century Guide to Member Induction” (“the Guide”), the review will aim to highlight the degree to which the arrangements meet good practice and where suitable, identify areas for consideration for future induction programmes. It should be noted that whilst it was agreed with management that this was a suitable scope for this review, the Council has not specifically sought to meet the requirements of the Guide up to this point.

The review will work through any initial potential areas for consideration with the Corporate Officer (Equalities and Organisational Development) and senior officers as appropriate, and any apparent findings appearing to warrant discussion with relevant member(s) will be agreed with officers in advance.”

The results of this review have been discussed accordingly at an exit meeting held with Charlotte Taylor, Corporate Officer (Equalities and Organisational Development) and feedback has also been provided by Andy O’Brien, Chief Executive.

Our key findings

We have reviewed the Induction Programme currently in progress and the process followed to plan the programme. As referred to above, there was a commendable level of member involvement in the planning phase, and the programme itself has represented an important investment of time and officer expertise into welcoming and inducting councillors elected or re-elected in May 2015 into the Council and their roles as Council members. Review of feedback on the sessions to date indicates a very good level of satisfaction with the programme.

More specifically, we were able to evidence that in the vast majority of the good practice areas set out within “the Guide”, the Council had effectively addressed the good practice advocated. In relation to the remaining areas, we set out the relevant good practices extracted from “the Guide”, the current position, and our suggested approaches below for further consideration by the Council:

The Council:

[Takes active steps to ensure those who could be eligible know whether a dependent carers’ allowance is payable?](#)

This has not been included as part of the Induction Programme to this point. We would suggest that the Council consider including reference to this in the Members Induction Pack in future and potentially to those considering standing as councillors who may be supported in doing so by being able to receive such an allowance.

The following points all relate to potential member development approaches:

- Offer Personal Development Plans (PDPs) for every member?
- Integrate the induction programme with the wider member development strategy?

We were advised that PDPs have been conducted in the past and are being introduced again at this point. The Council doesn't currently have a formal Member Development Strategy in place but has clearly taken an approach which seeks to identify and address key member development needs through this induction process and other further training and development opportunities.

- Run refresh sessions on expectations and techniques for working in administration and opposition?
- Provide guidance and advice on community leadership?

The induction programme does make reference to issues relating to community leadership (the LGA session) and, in the scrutiny session in particular, elements of the differing roles of working in opposition and administration.

Approaches to individual member's development within a PDP, dependent on their assessed needs, could include further guidance on working in opposition/as part of an administration, and the community leadership role, if these were felt to be required for specific members.

Clearly these are all matters which would need to be sought and/or supported by the elected members themselves and cannot and should not be imposed.

Achieved accreditation through the Regional and IDeA Charters for Member Development?*

This is not the case at this stage; any decision to seek such accreditation would need to carefully consider cost and benefits, particularly in the current financial climate, and we do not advocate seeking accreditation at this point accordingly without such a consideration.

*NB – the wording of these good practice areas is taken from “the Guide” – given the passage of time since “the Guide” was originally published these schemes have altered but similar schemes do remain available eg through the Local Government Association's Member Development Charter.

Overall conclusion and recommendation

Given the above findings, we are able to conclude that the Council has put in place a process for inducting members elected at the 2015 Borough election, and a range of supporting measures, which to a very large extent meet the good practices set out within “the Guide”. This is a very commendable outcome, and in the context of the review we consider can provide significant assurance in relation to the arrangements to address the risk referred to on page 1 of this letter.

We have highlighted above a few remaining areas which the Council may wish to consider as it reviews the current Induction Programme – we suggest these areas initially be discussed with the Councillor Induction Working Group in due course.

We will report in summary on the overall outcome of this review to the next Audit Committee meeting accordingly in accordance with our usual reporting process.

If you would like to discuss further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanks to those involved with this review for their co-operation.

Yours sincerely



Tim Ridout
Chief Auditor

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Compliance with applicable standards

Our review of compliance against the applicable audit standards has confirmed that this engagement has been conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing. In conducting this assignment we can confirm that there have been no impairments to our independence or objectivity, either as an organisation or as individual auditors involved in delivering this service.

Responsibility Statement

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