

31 March 2004

Survey Results and Recommendations - Member Training in Planning

Decisions

1. That the Executive endorses the recommendations of the survey into Member Training needs in Planning and approves the publication of the survey results.
2. That the Executive approves further work in this area, in the form of a Concordat or similar outline of good practice to be embraced by all councils wishing to demonstrate a commitment to the principles of effective member training and development in Planning.

Actions Required

3. Survey results to be published and circulated.

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Member Training in Planning

Summary

1. In August 2002 the LGA carried out a survey of elected members training needs. It was apparent from the survey that with the increasing focus on planning issues it would be useful to have supplementary information on members needs in this specific area. Consequently in October 2002 the RTPI sent questionnaires to Chief Executives, Chief Planning Officers, Council Leaders and leading Cabinet members as part of a joint LGA, ODPM, RTPI, IDeA survey on training in planning for councillors. The purpose of the survey was to gather information on the existing levels of training provided and those areas of perceived need. Response rates between these groups varied from 42 per cent to 15 per cent. The Executive summary (**See Appendix 1**) outlines the findings of the survey and also includes snapshots of councils demonstrating good practice in planning training for members.
2. The full statistical results of the survey are available at the Executive meeting if required. Recommendations emerging from analysis of the results can be grouped under four headings;
 - The amount of training
 - How training is provided
 - Content of training
 - Development of training

The amount of training

3. Local authorities and training providers should develop an integrated strategy and curriculum for training in spatial planning and sustainable communities for all elected members, whether or not they are on planning committees.
4. Elected members on planning committees should all receive training as a pre-requisite for sitting on such a committee. If there are issues about the enforceability of such a requirement, then the LGA should address these.
5. The existence and implementation of an agreed training strategy for elected members should be one of the indicators of an effective planning department under the Comprehensive Performance assessment regime.
6. The ODPM should prioritise elected member training in considering the allocation of future tranches of Planning Development Grant and in considering the future funding of the planning service both through planning fees and the 2004 Comprehensive Spending Review.
7. The LGA should review its Member Development Charter and disseminate good practice in training to its member authorities.

How training is provided

8. The integrated councillor training strategy recommended above should include both an explicit approach to varying the type and delivery of training events and methods through which the skills and knowledge of councillors is kept current after initial training.
9. Local authorities should extend the practice of forming training consortia for joint events and programmes.
10. Whilst the provision of initial training for all relevant councillors remains a shorter term priority, local authorities should widen the type of training undertaken to include more innovative approaches.
11. The LGA and local authorities should work with training providers to ensure that a wider range of cost-effective training programmes are available.
12. The LGA and the RTPI should report on the case for, and practicalities of, the accreditation of providers of councillor training.
13. The RTPI should pilot the agreed proposal in its Education Commission report that training providers in planning should receive some form of accreditation
14. Local authorities should examine more closely the benefits of involving community and business groups in training programmes, taking advice, if necessary, on issues of probity in doing so. The LGA should issue guidance on this if required.
15. The LGA, RTPI and representatives of the development industry are encouraged to pursue initiatives such as job swops, work shadowing, secondments and joint training between the public and private sectors involved in planning and development.

Content of training

16. The LGA, I&D^eA and the RTPI should co-operate to devise a new set of curricula for councillor training in planning.
17. The ODPM working with the LGA and the RTPI should identify the training needs and opportunities arising out of the new planning system and the sustainable communities agenda as soon as possible.
18. The developing curriculum should embrace aspects of planning which may not be considered as mainstream, such as neighbourhood renewal and community development.
19. Those organising and delivering training need to place a greater emphasis on outcomes whilst retaining the provision of entry level training on process and policy.

Development of training

20. Training curricula should be devised to form a developmental set of possible courses and modules to provide learning at different stages of a councillor's experience of the planning system.

21. Training strategies should include specific methods for assessing the benefits of councillor training and for incorporating the results of such assessments, and other feedback mechanisms, into future curricula and training delivery.

Background

Implications of the reform agenda

22. The Government has set out an ambitious agenda for the reform of the Planning system and the implementation of its proposals for sustainable communities. To achieve the systematic improvements needed to make a real difference, all areas of delivery are under scrutiny. The Egan Review of Skills (promised for April) is likely to highlight areas of improvement needed in terms not just of the professions involved in delivering effective planning, but in terms of the role of elected members and their requirements to meet the new and intensified demands.

Work by the LGA

23. The LGA has been working with partners to contribute to this debate and to pave the way for constructive responses. In association with Oxford Brookes, IDEA and the Employers Organisation, we carried out a Skills and Recruitment survey earlier in the year. Part one of the results was launched on March 3 at the LGA Planning conference and the remaining Part two results will be available in early April. We also developed a national template aimed at improving understanding of the developers approach for use by members, officers and the community. We have additionally been reviewing the requirements of elected members as discussed above.

Member survey

24. The **attached Appendix 1** sets out the Executive summary for the survey of elected members that we carried out. This joint project was carried out by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). The results of the survey offer opportunities for measures to be considered to improve the way that training for members in planning is delivered.

Implications for Wales

25. No direct implications although effective models and arrangements for member training are likely to be of national interest.

Financial/Resource Implications

26. In launching the Planning Development Grant there was a stated expectation that 'local planning authorities are expected to use some of these funds for the training of existing and new professionals and local politicians '. Most councils have existing budgets for member training and the development of new programmes with increased financial demands will impact on these.

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Members training in Planning

PLANNING TRAINING FOR COUNCILLORS

A survey by the Innovation and Development Agency (I&D^eA), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

Report by the ROOMatRTPI Politicians in Planning Association – 2 March 2004

RESULTS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepared in advance of publication for the LGA/NPF annual conference - *Delivering Planning*

Introduction

There is a major policy focus on the skills and knowledge needed to fulfil the Government's sustainable communities agenda. Initiatives such as the Planning Development Grant and the establishment of the review of skills under the chairmanship of Sir John Egan are indicators of the importance placed by the Government on strengthening the abilities of all those involved in planning, development and regeneration.

Too often, however, the debates about skills and knowledge focus on professionals and, to a lesser extent, on communities. The involvement of, and decisions by, elected members are central to the achievement of sustainable communities.

The new report on the Government's sustainable communities plan, *Making it happen: the Northern Way*, makes it clear that, 'Local authorities have a crucial role in both decision making and delivery. They must create the long-term vision for their area, and develop the relationships needed with central Government, local partners and the community to make that vision a reality. Local authorities are uniquely placed to understand the needs of their communities and reflect their aspirations. Councillors can act as the advocates of the local communities they represent; councils can act as the champions of their areas.'

The ODPM's 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan stated that '... our action programme requires the right people with commitment and, crucially, the right skills and knowledge. ... As part of this agenda we will boost capacity and skills in planning, especially in local authorities. Local Planning Authorities will be able to use some of the additional £350m for planning to train existing and new professionals and local politicians.' Sir John Egan told a conference at the end of 2003 that, "we are looking at how training for local authority members – especially those directly involved in planning processes – in generic and technical skills might be developed."

Given these contexts, a survey of the actual and desirable training provision is very timely. The survey was undertaken in 2003 but the messages it presents are very relevant at a time when a new planning system is about to come into operation and the strengthening of the abilities of all those who will be involved in it is high on the agenda.

The survey was undertaken in order to gain a clearer picture not only on the amount and type of training being carried at present but also on the perceived additional needs in the future. Separate questionnaires were sent to Chief Executives; Chief Planning Officers or equivalent; Council Leaders; and leading Cabinet members. Response rates between these groups varied from 42 per cent to 15 per cent.

The detailed findings of this study are to be set out in tables at the end of the final report. This summary is designed to bring out highlights from those findings and to show the lessons that they provide for training for Councillors in the future. The summary is divided into four sections; dealing with the amount of training, how training is provided, the content of training and the development of training. There are three case studies showing effective practice in a metropolitan, district and county council.

Recommendations

Recommendations are contained at the end of each section but are listed below for convenience.

- 1. Local authorities and training providers should develop an integrated strategy and curriculum for training in spatial planning and sustainable communities for all elected members, whether or not they are on planning committees.**
- 2. Elected members on planning committees should all receive training as a pre-requisite for sitting on such a committee. If there are issues about the enforceability of such a requirement, then the LGA should address these.**
- 3. The existence and implementation of an agreed training strategy for elected members should be one of the indicators of an effective planning department under the Comprehensive Performance assessment regime.**
- 4. The ODPM should prioritise elected member training in considering the allocation of future tranches of Planning Development Grant and in considering the future funding of the planning service both through planning fees and the 2004 Comprehensive Spending Review.**
- 5. The LGA should review its Member Development Charter and disseminate good practice in training to its member authorities.**
- 6. The integrated councillor training strategy recommended above should include both an explicit approach to varying the type and delivery of training events and methods through which the skills and knowledge of councillors is kept current after initial training.**
- 7. Local authorities should extend the practice of forming training consortia for joint events and programmes.**
- 8. Whilst the provision of initial training for all relevant councillors remains a shorter term priority, local authorities should widen the type of training undertaken to include more innovative approaches.**
- 9. The LGA and local authorities should work with training providers to ensure that a wider range of cost-effective training programmes are available.**
- 10. The LGA and the RTPi should report on the case for, and practicalities of, the accreditation of providers of councillor training.**

11. The RTPI should pilot the agreed proposal in its Education Commission report that training providers in planning should receive some form of accreditation.
12. Local authorities should examine more closely the benefits of involving community and business groups in training programmes, taking advice, if necessary, on issues of probity in doing so. The LGA should issue guidance on this if required.
13. The LGA, RTPI and representatives of the development industry are encouraged to pursue initiatives such as job swaps, work shadowing, secondments and joint training between the public and private sectors involved in planning and development.
14. The LGA, I&D⁵A and the RTPI should co-operate to devise a new set of curricula for councillor training in planning.
15. The ODPM working with the LGA and the RTPI should identify the training needs and opportunities arising out of the new planning system and the sustainable communities agenda as soon as possible.
16. The developing curriculum should embrace aspects of planning which may not be considered as mainstream, such as neighbourhood renewal and community development.
17. Those organising and delivering training need to place a greater emphasis on outcomes whilst retaining the provision of entry level training on process and policy.
18. Training curricula should be devised to form a developmental set of possible courses and modules to provide learning at different stages of a councillor's experience of the planning system.
19. Training strategies should include specific methods for assessing the benefits of councillor training and for incorporating the results of such assessments, and other feedback mechanisms, into future curricula and training delivery.

Amount of training

Overall, the survey provided a positive picture of the number of local authorities that require councillors to undertake training. 78% of Chief Executives stated that their Councils required such training and 67% state that more than three quarters of their Councillors have undertaken it.

Such figures provide a sound basis for the development of an even more comprehensive approach to Councillor training in planning. In stating this, it needs to be borne in mind, however, that even this high proportion of authorities requiring training means that nearly a quarter of Councils did not have any such requirement.

Two very different views from the survey show a wide range of attitudes towards training:

"All the training in the world will not help Members go against local feelings. Sitting all day at a training session does not mean a Member has learned anything. At the end of the day the public put us where we are and we have to support them or lose our seat!"
Cabinet Member in a Unitary District

"We have had excellent seminars, usually at the start of the municipal year, with simulation exercises on determination. We have had some very, very controversial decisions in recent years, with appalling press coverage and distasteful attempts at influencing members and officers, but have kept a clean sheet and our integrity. Faint hearts win neither bids nor fair decisions."

Cabinet member in an urban Borough Council

Similarly high proportions of Councils required training for Councillors sitting on planning committees (77 per cent are required to undertake it according to Chief Executives) and there appears to be a strong commitment for this to be done as early as possible with Chief Planning Officers reporting that 68 per cent of planning committee members had undergone training within three months.

In this case, however, the overall proportion requiring training is not seen to be so positive given that Lord Nolan's report on *Standards of Conduct in Local Government* (TSO 1997) recommended that, 'All members of an authority's planning committee (or equivalent) should receive training in the planning system either before serving on the committee, or as soon as possible after their appointment to the committee.' (R34).

As the two quotes, below, from the survey show, there is some confusion as to whether training can, indeed, be made compulsory:

The City Council has a Code of Conduct for members in respect of planning – training in planning is a requirement of the Code of Conduct.

Chief Executive of a North West City Council

Members are offered training. It cannot be made a requirement except in particular circumstances.

Chief Executive of a North East City Council

There are a much lower proportion of authorities requiring compulsory training for councillors who do not sit on planning committees. Less than a third of responding Chief Executives (29 per cent) said that there was some form of training in planning for all elected members. This is a cause for concern.

The reform of local government, with, in particular the introduction of the cabinet system has meant that the whole council needs to have a strategic view of the planning priorities in their area. Whilst the planning committee will, on the whole, deal with applications, there is now no committee dealing with planning policy development, strategic policy and the forthcoming statutory duty not only to prepare local development documents but a local development scheme and a statement of community involvement.

The new system to be introduced through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act will require a significant development of skills and knowledge by elected members and officers and will require a new approach to the involvement of councillors – particularly in respect of statements of community involvement.

It will also require those on planning committees dealing with applications to have an even greater understanding of the policy context given that the new system allows for a greater range of statutory and non-statutory policy documents. All this will require a more comprehensive approach to elected member training in spatial planning focused on all councillors and not simply those on planning committees. - as the two comments below show.

'Members are now working to and within the "modernising agenda" within the authority there is a split in the policy making responsibility and the implementation/development control functions. It is essential that those taking development control decisions have a real involvement in policy formulation.'

Chief Planning Officer of a County Council

'The split between "policymaking" and "regulation" and created by cabinet government leads to interesting gaps in policy knowledge/awareness of planning committees. Clear need for more training generally to fill these growing gaps'

Chief Planning Officer of a South East District Council

The overall commitment for training is, again, a cause for concern. This is indicated by, for example, the fact that only 50 per cent of responding councils have a training 'champion' and only 36 per cent of respondees stated that their authority had signed the LGA's member development charter. If skills and abilities are to be developed, then there must be a culture of training and development within each local authority. To a significant extent this will depend on time and resources but this is not the ultimate block to training. As the next section shows, a high proportion of authorities rely on in-house training and there is scope for approaches, such as peer training and officer/member seminars that require time but are not otherwise resource intensive.

Recommendations

- 1. Local authorities and training providers should develop an integrated strategy and curriculum for training in spatial planning and sustainable communities for all elected members, whether or not they are on planning committees.**
- 2. Elected members on planning committees should all receive training as a prerequisite for sitting on such a committee. If there are issues about the enforceability of such a requirement, then the LGA should address these.**
- 3. The existence and implementation of an agreed training strategy for elected members should be one of the indicators of an effective planning department under the Comprehensive Performance assessment regime.**
- 4. The ODPM should prioritise elected member training in considering the allocation of future tranches of Planning Development Grant and in considering the future funding of the planning service both through planning fees and the 2004 Comprehensive Spending Review.**
- 5. The LGA should review its Member Development Charter and disseminate good practice in training to its member authorities.**

CASE STUDY

Nottinghamshire County Council

Nottinghamshire County Council's first steps towards active member development began in late 1996 with the introduction of a Members' Training Adviser, a Members' Training budget and a reporting body – The Members' Services Panel – which focused on members' training, development, allowances and support services.

A serious commitment was made to member development with the inclusion of councillors in the planning, design, production and evaluation of their training and development activities. This was reinforced a year later by the introduction of structured individual Personal Development Planning for members.

Personal Development Planning

Nottinghamshire's Personal Development Planning process is built around nine specific areas:

- ◆ *Members' own work/political experiences*
- ◆ *Personal and professional role objectives for the year ahead*
- ◆ *360 degree Leadership Audits*
- ◆ *Career development*
- ◆ *Organisational strategies, vision and values*
- ◆ *Legislation and policy development*

- ◆ *Local and regional developments*
- ◆ *Future projections and forecasts*
- ◆ *Health and well being issues*

The outcomes of the individual plans form the basis of the council's Corporate Members' Training and Development Plan.

The induction process for Nottinghamshire's new councillors is taken very seriously. A pre-induction pack and detailed learning and development programme is delivered for all councillors through a combination of written documentation, seminars, presentations, coaching, direct training, shadowing, IT, mentoring and Learning Adviser support.

Evaluation is considered critical to the learning and development process. Where members attend events organised by other organisations they are expected to discuss the value of the events on their return and distribute relevant learning materials to colleagues.

Formal Training

In addition to the training pack and handbook which all new Nottinghamshire councillors receive, the council's environment department produce a training pack for all planning committee members which includes a Members' Training Handbook. This handbook contains information on areas such as planning legislation and Planning Policy Guidance, Regional Planning Guidance, the Structure Plan, Local Plans, the Development Plan, planning applications and information on planning in a European context.

The handbook also includes the factors to consider when making a planning decision. All planning committee Councillors, as soon as appointed, must attend a training session with the council's officers to cover procedural issues, legislation and policy guidance.

Information reports are regularly presented to the planning committee on areas such as new legislation, policy guidance and procedural matters as they arise.

Officers also make presentations to the committee on specific issues of general interest to committee members when necessary and offer Planning Policy Guidance at committee meetings.

Site visits are arranged for councillors to increase their knowledge of the latest thinking and techniques in areas such as waste management.

Councillors as individuals attend a variety of training events, such as the RTP/I/TCPSS summer school (attended by three members of the committee every year) and regional and national seminars. Members have a responsibility to report about the events they have attended to the committee on their return. They are also requested to bring back relevant information from the event.

Informal Training

Nottinghamshire County Council have their own on-site Local Government Library. The library's staff set up personal folders for all members, collate articles on their subject interests from newspapers and journals and file them in members' folders to enhance members' subject knowledge and keep them informed of the latest developments in their policy areas.

The library also provides internet access for councillors and library staff bookmark planning-related websites for members along similar lines to the personal folders.

Outcomes

The training programme at Nottinghamshire has been well received by members. Members' knowledge of planning has been greatly enhanced and this has resulted in a more efficient and effective planning performance across the authority. Customer satisfaction with the planning

service has risen from 76% in 2000/01 to 85% in 2003/04 and the percentage of planning applications determined within 13 weeks has risen significantly in recent years. Regular training sessions and site visits have helped to foster close working relationships between officers and members and this has greatly assisted the smooth operation of planning matters throughout the authority. The council's effective strategic planning performance was recognised in the council's Round Three Beacon Award for better access and mobility in 2002.

How training is provided

The questions in this section of the survey focused on the methods by which training is provided. A very high proportion of training is done in-house by officers. 62 per cent of chief planning officers stated that training was mostly provided in this way and 84 per cent said that training was provided and devised within the authority. A small but significant proportion (8 per cent) only relied on this method while 16 per cent of authorities never went on external training courses. The survey does not show the extent to which training for elected members is undertaken jointly with the officers of the authority.

This method of provision is, in part, a clear reaction to budget constraints and in-house training by officers is a pragmatic response to this situation, as this quote demonstrates:

'Much of the training provided for elected members is delivered in-house by Officers for which no charge is made against the allocated annual budget.'
Chief Executive of a South East Borough Council

In-house training by officers does also have other benefits in terms, for example, of supporting a corporate approach to decision making and in terms of tapping into local knowledge. However, this approach can mean that some authorities will not benefit from fresh approaches and knowledge of effective practice elsewhere in planning.

This conclusion is tempered by the fact that a significant proportion of authorities responding to the survey undertook joint training with other authorities (31 per cent) or looked at policy and practice examples from outside their own area (81 per cent). This has the potential benefit not only of providing potential benchmarks for a Council's own practice but of forging relationships with other authorities in advance of the new emphasis on cross-boundary and sub-regional working that is contained in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill.

One method of achieving this is to establish training consortia of adjoining or similar authorities both so that such interchange of ideas can be fostered and so that economies of scale can be used to lower the unit cost of training.

The fairly low proportion of authorities which make frequent use of external training events also creates a challenge for training providers to devise events which are seen to be as cost effective as in-house events. For example, the survey suggested that there should be an annual seminar series for councillors covering a standard curriculum.

If training is to be delivered in an integrated and cost-effective way then serious consideration needs to be given to some form of liaison between those providing such training. Current councillor training providers include: the annual Councillors Planning Summer School run by the RTPi and TCPSS; CABE; Hawksmere; I&D^oA; Local Government Association; Planning Co-operative, ROOMatRTPi Politicians in Planning Association; RTPi, including through its branch

programme; TCPA; Trevor Roberts Associates; and a number of Universities, notably Oxford Brooks and University of the West of England.

The RTPI Education Commission recommended that the RTPI accredit training providers in respect of the RTPI's own CPD requirements. It is understood that the NRU is also considering the accreditation of its training providers. A case can be made for such accreditation to be extended to providers of councillor training.

A low proportion of authorities involved either local communities or businesses in councillor training. Some clear reasons can be assumed for this; including the fear that councillors could be thought to be placed in a difficult position in respect of transparent objectivity if potential applicants – or objectors – were involved in training sessions. However, one of the objectives of training is to better understand the policies and objectives of the voluntary and business sectors. The sustainable communities agenda encourages and, to an extent, relies on partnership working between local government and all other sectors and the involvement of those sectors in councillor training – or even in joint training events – would be beneficial. This is particularly the case when local authorities need to understand such matters as development economics and housing grant regimes in order to make better informed decisions on planning obligations. This must be a two way process with all sectors being willing to exchange information and knowledge. The LGA and the RTPI are currently exploring the feasibility of establishing exchange and secondment mechanisms between the public and private sectors in planning and development.

The survey showed some examples of innovative training methods. These included study tours (77 per cent of chief planning officers stating that these were sometimes provided) and work shadowing (18 per cent). Given the figures contained in the first section of this report, a major emphasis must be on providing an initial training in planning for all councillors. However, there are a range of supporting approaches that can be employed to add to this core need, including exchange visits with other authorities.

It is also relevant to note that a number of respondees ask for training to be on-going and updated rather than being seen as a one-off.

Finally, this interim report has not directly covered resources. The final report will do so but it is worth noting that a large number of respondees commented on the need for more financial support for training.

With the ceaseless initiatives from Whitehall on planning and related issues (especially housing), the Government should financially support ongoing planning training.
Leader of a South East District Council

Recommendations

- 6. The integrated councillor training strategy should include both an explicit approach to varying the type and delivery of training events and methods through which the skills and knowledge of councillors is kept current after initial training.**
- 7. Local authorities should extend the practice of forming training consortia for joint events and programmes.**
- 8. Whilst the provision of initial training for all relevant councillors remains a shorter term priority, local authorities should widen the type of training undertaken to include more innovative approaches.**

9. The LGA and local authorities should work with training providers to ensure that a wider range of cost-effective training programmes are available.
10. The LGA and the RTPI should report on the case for, and practicalities of, the accreditation of providers of councillor training.
11. The RTPI should pilot the agreed proposal in its Education Commission report that training providers in planning should receive some form of accreditation.
12. Local authorities should examine more closely the benefits of involving community and business groups in training programmes, taking advice, if necessary, on issues of probity in doing so. The LGA should issue guidance on this if required.
13. The LGA, RTPI and representatives of the development industry are encouraged to pursue initiatives such as job swaps, work shadowing, secondments and joint training between the public and private sectors involved in planning and development.

CASE STUDY

Middlesbrough Borough Council

Middlesbrough Council views training for members in planning as crucial to the effective operation of both the planning service and the council as a whole. When the council adopted a leader and cabinet governance model in 1999 it soon became clear that arrangements for supporting and training members needed to be updated. The members' office was subsequently strengthened to ensure members were adequately prepared for their new roles.

The council's Corporate Training Manager, Members' Office Manager and the Councillor Advocate (the member who acts as a link between cabinet and non-cabinet members) assess members' training and development needs and ensure that they are met.

A newly-updated Code of Practice for all members and officers who become involved in the planning system provides the foundation for the council's planning service. The Code covers subjects such as the roles of councillors and officers, the basis for planning decisions, lobbying, declaration of interests and the committee process.

The council's Planning and Development Committee (PDC) meets every three weeks and works within the council's Code of Practice and associated procedures.

Formal Training

All ten members of the PDC must undergo training on planning procedures and planning law. Following the 2003 elections, the members of the PDC were given an introductory half-day training session which covered the development plan system, Middlesbrough's development control system, the Middlesbrough building regulation system and the Planning Code of Good Practice.

Some of the council's other recent training on planning issues has included:

- ◆ *A morning session covering the role of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and changes in building regulations, provided by Colin Haylock of CABE and internal officers.*
- ◆ *A lunchtime session on the committee process and publicity for planning applications, provided internally.*
- ◆ *A presentation on the Planning Portal by Richard Baker of the Planning Inspectorate and internal officers.*

- ◆ *A lunchtime session on the Disability Discrimination Act with Gordon Allan of the Disability Rights Commission.*
- ◆ *A session on building regulations and the council's Design Awards, presented by Bill MacKay of the Health and Safety Executive and internal officers.*

Other sessions are provided on an ad hoc basis to meet the committee's requests. Recent ad hoc sessions have been requested on conservation and telephone masts, and future sessions are planned on topics such as probity, enforcement, change of use and the appeal system. Training has been provided by a mixture of internal and external speakers but the council have found that members relate better to internal speakers, as they are able to make the training more relevant to the members' needs and experience.

Informal Training

Members also undertake site visits for every meeting of the Planning and Development Committee, usually the day before the committee meets. Such ongoing exposure to planning problems keeps members well informed.

Members of the Planning and Development Committee attend meetings of the Building Industry Consultative Forum for informational and educational purposes.

The council produces a weekly update of planning applications by ward, enabling the PDC members to stay fully aware of the key events on their patch.

Outcomes

The frequency of the Planning and Development Committee meetings and their associated site visits has enabled a close working relationship to be formed between members and officers. This close working relationship, along with helpful member training and a collection of knowledgeable committee members, has enhanced members' familiarity with planning processes and legislation and enabled members' to make effective decisions.

The council scores well in Best Value Performance Indicators for planning and has a comparatively low level of appeals against their planning decisions. The council's planning service currently has a 92% satisfaction rate and the council was recently commended by the Planning Minister Keith Hill for the quality of their service.

Content of Training

The next issue to be covered was the content of training and training curricula. Overall, the survey demonstrated a good coverage of planning processes and procedures (93+ per cent) and of local and central planning policy (83+ per cent). In addition, 94 per cent of respondees stated that their authority covered the relative roles of members and officers. It is clear that these areas of understanding form the mainstay of Councillor training.

The survey sought responses on areas of training that respondents considered to be needed. The significant areas are shown below with the list of identified needs being derived both from the quantitative returns (with needs which are mentioned in more than 25 per cent being included) and from the qualitative responses with subjects that are mentioned most frequently being listed below.

Identified training needs

Significant number of references in statistical returns:

- ◆ Sustainable development
- ◆ Integration with other policies
- ◆ Economic development

- ◆ Neighbourhood renewal
- ◆ Community development
- ◆ Development economics
- ◆ Measuring success
- ◆ Relationships with key departmental staff (particularly identified by Leaders and cabinet members)

Significant number of references in written returns:

- ◆ Probity/ propriety/ code of conduct
- ◆ What is a 'relevant consideration' and 'material consideration'
- ◆ The new system
- ◆ Legislation
- ◆ Policy updates
- ◆ The roles of elected members
- ◆ Design
- ◆ The link between policy and dev. control

It can be seen that there are a number of identifiable themes emerging from this list. There is the desire to be better informed on areas of policy and practice that impinge on planning but are not always included in mainstream practice. Secondly, there is a desire for more training in the area of the roles of councillors, probity and relationships with officers. The mention of what are material considerations comes into this area. This comment adds a further dimension to the perceived outcomes of training.

A knowledge of and respect for policies; persuading Councillors to act in the best interests of the wider community rather than parochially; to keep politics out of planning.

Leader of a Yorkshire & Humberside Borough Council

Finally and importantly, the frequent reference to 'measuring success' highlights one apparent significant gap in current training. This is a focus on outcomes as well as on process and policy. The new form of 'spatial' planning being introduced through current legislation embodies an emphasis on outcomes and councillor training will need to focus more on this.

Finally, it needs to be borne in mind that the survey was undertaken before the elements of the new planning system were as clear as they are now and before a number of significant policy initiatives, such as the sustainable communities plan, were introduced. There is, therefore, also the clear need to provide a curriculum of training related to the major current issues in policy and practice. These will include:

- ◆ Sustainable communities and the sustainable communities plan
- ◆ The new planning system and the practice of spatial planning
- ◆ Compulsory purchase and land assembly
- ◆ Development management
- ◆ Relationships between different strategies and plans at both national and regional levels
- ◆ The emerging suite of ODPM policies

'Need to enhance the proactive role more specifically to achieve an enhanced and sustainable form of development that achieves economic benefits, particularly in small urban settlements. We could do more to engage residents in planning brief process.'

Leader of a South East District Council

Case Study
Chelmsford Borough Council

Chelmsford Borough Council is committed to member development to ensure that members can fulfil their various democratic roles and responsibilities.

The Council offers its members a wide range of training opportunities to achieve this aim. Training on planning issues is a very important subject for all members, particularly those on the council's Executive, Planning Committee, Development Policy Board and Development Review Committee because of the high profile, politically-sensitive nature of built environment and the highly complex legislative and policy framework members have to work within.

Chelmsford delivers its member training both formally and informally, aiming it at both the learning needs of new members and the development needs of existing members. Following local elections in May 2003, nearly 20 new members are now sitting on these planning-related council committees and board, out of a total membership of 24.

Formal Training

Formal training is managed through a co-ordinated Member Development Programme, where each member has an individual learning and development plan to suit their individual needs.

Recent formal training specifically on planning issues has included:

- ◆ *A whole day of training – 'An Introduction to Town Planning' – was set up by the Council in June 2003, aimed at new members but also attended by some existing members seeking to refresh their planning knowledge..*
- ◆ *This was followed by two evening sessions on probity when dealing with planning matters, held in October/ November 2003.*
- ◆ *Ad hoc members' workshop sessions are held following the close of Planning Committee meetings where a need has been identified by members or by officers. For example, a session was recently arranged on telecommunications and issues surrounding telephone mast and equipment applications.*
- ◆ *Individual briefings are arranged with key members on specific topics or planning applications of concern.*
- ◆ *A tour was recently organised for members to visit some of the area's new housing developments. The aim of the tour was to educate members about design features in new housing development, in order to raise their awareness of the importance of design in the planning process.*

Informal Training

Informal training focuses on self-learning, with resources made available for individual members to use when they have the specific need or time.

The council's website is a major resource for information. The planning pages on Chelmsford's website are copied into the Member Zone on the council's intranet, with extra information available that is not accessible to the public. Information includes up to date lists of applications and appeals and updates on Government legislation.

The council's Beacon website is updated regularly with case studies, specific examples of how the council is working towards 'making better places', information on planning guidance and details of forthcoming events. Updates are notified to members via an internal electronic messaging system.

Outcomes

Chelmsford was awarded Beacon Council status for Quality of the Built Environment in June 2003 for its commitment to quality, as reflected in its corporate policy, its proactive planning service and the Council's aspirations for an urban renaissance in the town. A presentation was given to members soon after the last council elections in May 2003 on the Beacon award and the council's work in the built environment. Members are invited to attend Beacon events, particularly the major Open Days, free of charge, as a development opportunity.

Additionally, the Council has established the role of member design champion. The Executive Member for Planning embraces this role by ensuring that design issues are given a high priority when considering planning applications. The design champion is also leading members' thinking on design in conjunction with the Council's urban designers and is promoting the Council's Beacon success through contacts with partner organisations.

This training programme and informal self-learning ensures that members keep abreast of new issues, have opportunities to discuss solutions to specific planning problems, can highlight their own training needs and can keep design at the forefront of their planning deliberations.

Recommendations

- 14. The LGA, I&D^eA and the RTPi should co-operate to devise a new set of curricula for councillor training in planning.**
- 15. The ODPM working with the LGA and the RTPi should identify the training needs and opportunities arising out of the new planning system and the sustainable communities agenda as soon as possible.**
- 16. The developing curriculum should embrace aspects of planning which may not be considered as mainstream, such as neighbourhood renewal and community development.**
- 17. Those organising and delivering training need to place a greater emphasis on outcomes whilst retaining the provision of entry level training on process and policy.**

Development of training

If training is to be beneficial to elected members and to planning in general, then its needs to be developmental in both offering a progressive curriculum for members at different stages of their involvement in planning and in reflecting feedback from members as to its content, style and applicability.

The survey demonstrated that there was a high proportion of councillor involvement in the training programme but, in many cases, the nature of this involvement was not specified. The practice of encouraging member feedback on individual training events was widespread. This quote demonstrates how Councillor involvement can be at the heart of training.

'We are currently drawing up a revised Members Development Training Programme, which will include Councillors being involved in drawing up their own development plans. This will allow the Councillor to undertake training relevant to their needs/roles carried out.

Chief Executive of an East Midlands City Council

However, the survey found that a low proportion of authorities engaged in any formal assessment of the benefits of training for councillors or for the practice and outcomes of planning. This 'loop' needs to be built into local authorities' councillor training strategies so that the maximum benefit can be derived from this activity.

Recommendations

- 18. Training curricula should be devised to form a developmental set of possible courses and modules to provide learning at different stages of a councillor's experience of the planning system.**

- 19. Training strategies should include specific methods for assessing the benefits of councillor training and for incorporating the results of such assessments, and other feedback mechanisms, into future curricula and training delivery.**

Effective Practice

The three case studies demonstrate different, but comprehensive, ways of meeting the training needs of Councillors. This interim report ends with two statements from different types of authority showing a strategic and positive approach to training.

'A steering Group for Training was set up to 'champion' training and consists of Group leaders (or their representatives). We have committed to the Charter for members' development and are working towards meeting the standard. The induction events following elections are currently being planned and it is being recommended that the Planning Events are mandatory.'
Chief Executive of a South West Unitary Council

'We have just carried out over the past year, a complete training programme on all aspects of planning, including visits of sites of interest in other Boroughs as well as our own. We have also reviewed the planning process in order to make the system more effective and efficient and held seminars on code of conduct etc.'
Leader of a South East District Council
