

TITLE OF REPORT: **Audit and Standards Committee – Training and Induction**

REPORT OF: **Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate
Services and Governance**

Purpose of the Report

1. This report sets out proposals for induction and training plans for the Audit and Standards Committee and seeks views from the Committee on the approach.

Background

2. The Audit and Standards Committee has previously considered a report on the Councillors' Engagement and Development Framework. The Framework is intended to guide councillors on how they undertake their duties, and particularly relates to consultation, engagement, training and development.
3. All training and development is important, but some areas are considered essential. All councillors (and independent members) are expected to undertake training on several areas including Ethics and Probity and training related to committee membership.
4. In addition to guidance, the Framework also contains role descriptors with a specific one being produced relating to a member of the Audit and Standards Committee (attached at Appendix 1).

Proposal

Induction

5. At present all newly elected councillors undertake an induction programme which consists of them meeting all Strategic Directors. As part of this programme they receive a hard copy of the Council's Code of Conduct and related guidance following their election. It is proposed that they will also receive a hard copy of the Local Code of Governance in their induction packs. These will also be provided to independent members following their appointment.
6. In addition, all newly appointed members of the Audit and Standards Committee, including councillors and independent members, will receive an induction meeting from officers from Corporate Services and Governance and Corporate Resources prior to their first attendance at the Committee.
7. The induction meeting will cover the role and remit of the Committee, the role descriptor for members of the Committee, any training needs they need to fulfil their roles, and an overview of the governance structures of the authority and decision making processes.

Training

8. All councillors are expected to undertake training on Ethics and Probity once in their four-year term following their election. In order to facilitate this, regular training opportunities are arranged throughout the year following the election. Four sessions have been held in 2018/19. Further sessions will be arranged in 2019/20 starting in September 2019.
9. The Audit and Standards Self Assessment for 2017/18 to support the Annual Governance Statement included a comment that a skills analysis of the Committee should be undertaken, following which a Development Plan will be drawn up which will be subject to continuous formal committee review. A suggested Development Plan is attached at Appendix 2. Members of the Committee will be asked to identify those areas where their skills set could be strengthened by further training. This will inform the final Development Plan for the Committee.
10. Notwithstanding the completion of the skills analysis, it would be prudent to plan for delivery of training in relation to Risk and Counter Fraud as both of these areas have undergone changes recently, and it is proposed that training on these areas should be arranged during 2019/20 starting after the local elections in order to ensure that newly elected councillors have the opportunity to attend these sessions.
11. It is also proposed that the training opportunities referred to above be offered to all members of the Council.
12. The Chair of the Committee attended a CIPFA event (Development Day for Local Authority Audit Committees) on 16 January 2019. Officers will identify opportunities for members of the Committee to attend similar national and regional events. Any member attending such an event would be expected to give feedback and share any learning materials with the Committee to maximise learning and development opportunities.
13. It is also suggested that Mazars could be requested to give some short sessions at the end of committee meetings on aspects of their work with the Council, such as their Audit Completion Report and Statement of Accounts.
14. The Chair and Vice Chair are invited to meetings of the North East Governance Forum, hosted by Mazars, which along with presentations and discussions on topical issues, provides networking and member development opportunities. These meetings are attended by Audit Committee Chairs / Vice Chairs from other North East Councils, along with their Chief Internal Auditors.

Recommendation

15. It is recommended that the Committee:
 - (i) consider the proposed induction and training plans;
 - (ii) consider whether there are any additional induction or training needs which could be incorporated into the plans; and
 - (iii) to receive a further report at the next meeting on the Development Plan.