



# **MEDSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL**

## **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

### **1. Purpose and scope**

This document sets out Medstead Parish Council's commitment to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours of its Councillors and employees. This will help them achieve and maintain a high standard of performance and give them encouragement and support to achieve their full potential. This in turn will help the Council to deliver an effective and efficient service to its residents and meet the priorities for the future.

### **2. Identifying and meeting training needs**

#### **2.1 Clerk / RFO**

Officer training and development ensures Council employees have the up-to-date knowledge and skills to be effective and efficient in their role, remain motivated and develop new ideas that benefit the Council and the community it serves.

Officers are expected to be proactive in identifying their training needs and research the opportunities to meet them. They are usually best placed to know the areas where they need better skills and knowledge. This will include keeping abreast of any changes in legislation or financial guidance as they arise and anticipating any changes in role or any new skills required by new projects, as well as more routine improvements in skills and knowledge.

The Council may also identify officer training needs, such as during induction and probationary periods, one-to-ones, appraisals, work planning and change processes.

The Council expects the Clerk to undertake a programme of continuing professional development (CPD). As a guideline, the SLCC recommends that a Clerk should achieve 12 points of Continuous Professional Development per year, and this is also the minimum for a council to achieve the Foundation Award under the Local Council Award Scheme.

The Officer should keep a record of training provided.

Training needs can be met in a number of ways:

- Attendance at conferences, seminars and short courses
- Online training
- Internal coaching, e.g. from Councillors or other staff (if applicable)
- Learning resources (books, journals, DVDs etc.)
- Work shadowing or mentoring
- Time for self-directed research and learning

Different methods will be suited to different aspects of training and have different time and cost implications. The council will encourage employees to identify their own learning styles and will seek to provide a wide variety of learning and training methods.

Face to face and online group courses are often more costly but are particularly effective when an expert is covering a specialist area; training is needed in a quick, focused burst; or when questions and answers, shared experiences and networking are a valuable part of the learning experience. The Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) runs courses on a wide range of topics. The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) also has a good programme of training events.

Online learning tools usually involve self-directed time management over a period of study that fits flexibly around workload, with the ability to revisit material and in-built 'testing' to check learning. For new Clerks, HALC offers an online ILCA course that all new unqualified Clerks should undertake as a precursor to CILCA, and the FICLA course on finance is also recommended to any employee also new to being an RFO.

The Council expects a new Clerk to complete ILCA within the first year in post and to complete CILCA within two years (assuming normal workload). A CILCA-qualified Clerk is one of the conditions of a Council gaining General Power of Competence.

Mentoring by Councillors or other Clerks is very important for new Clerks as it is impossible to learn everything at once and it allows quick help on issues as they arise. The Chairman of the Council or another delegated Councillor should mentor a new Clerk in the first few months. HALC offers a formal mentoring programme for free to new Clerks. Officers should also be encouraged to join networking events through HALC or the SLCC, such as HALC's regular 'Updates for Clerks and Finance Officers'; these briefing events share changes in legislation and other matters, but a large part of the benefit is building up a network of people who can be contacted for help with specific questions and building up a knowledge base of which Councils have tried various initiatives etc. in order to be able to re-use learning experiences where possible.

There is a lot of free reading material available online including the HALC, NALC and SLCC websites. All legislation is available for free on Government websites. The accounting software provider Scribe provides access to a lot of free training videos and documents. The current internal auditor provides low cost training events and occasional free seminars / networking events. The Smaller Authorities' Proper Practices Panel (SAPP) Practitioners Guide changes every year and is essential reading for Officers.

The Council should recognise that this free online material can be a cost-effective way of learning when needing to gain knowledge on a particular topic, but work time has to be allowed for continuing professional development by this means rather than consider it is something the Officer does in their own time as it is an essential part of the job.

When weighing up training requests, the council should consider how readily available and usable a free online alternative is. For example, it may be just as effective for an officer to spend two hours reading a piece of legislation or HALC or NALC briefing note rather than going on a course about it. But a short paid-for course may far preferable if it is a topic for which the Officer is going to spend many hours of paid work-time just sourcing useful

material or if something is complex and will require questions and explanations, or if a piece of legislation is hundreds of pages long or involves multi-levels of legislation spread over years, and the Officer needs to just extract some essential points. The Officer has a responsibility to weigh up alternatives and consider the most cost-effective / time effective way of learning rather than always choosing a course as the first *de facto* option, given budget limitations, and the Council should also consider these factors. However, the Council should not underestimate the large amount of knowledge that an Officer has to attain, maintain and refresh in order to legally and effectively do their job.

## **1.2 Councillors**

Councillors are holders of public office who provide their time on a voluntary basis. Training may help them better understand and perform their role to serve the community.

New Councillors who are elected or co-opted need to be supported and encouraged to undertake training. The Clerk will provide new Councillors with an 'induction pack' of useful reading (including the NALC range of 'Good Councillor Guides') when they first join and direct them to the wealth of online advice and support on the HALC and NALC websites and encourage them to register an account.

The Clerk and senior Councillors will act as mentors to new Councillors to help them get up to speed. They will also make Councillors aware of training opportunities available through HALC. Their 'Knowledge and Core Skills' training for new Councillors aims to equip them with the knowledge and core skills needed to be an effective Councillor and the confidence to engage in local democracy and identify areas of interest. This is not compulsory, but a very good idea to complete within the first six months of becoming a Councillor. As spaces fill quickly, early booking is recommended.

For existing Councillors there is other more specialist training that should be identified on a needs-basis. For example, HALC provides training on Planning, which is good for any Councillors wishing to take on a planning role. Training is available on Chairmanship for Councillors newly taking on this role. Training is also available on finance for Councillors taking on a more financial role.

Councillors should be encouraged to continue their development by reading briefings sent to them and taking an interest in public sector publications and should be encouraged to explore material on the HALC and NALC websites.

As well as paid-for training, there are free face-to-face and online events from time to time that help Councillors understand their roles and network with other Councillors (e.g. HALC forums) and the Clerk will share details of these with Councillors as they arise. The Clerk will continually note, and seek out where necessary, any events by other organisations.

Councillors should keep the Clerk informed of any training and professional development they have undertaken so that the Clerk can keep a record. This includes informing the Clerk of any relevant training that they have undertaken outside of the Parish Council.

It is recognised that some Councillors undertake training in their working environment which is transferable to the Parish Council.

The allocation of training to Councillors must be needs-based, but also on a fair basis.

## **2. Considering a training request**

### **2.1 Budget**

The Council must build training costs into its budget and so should identify training needs in advance as best it can. Availability of finance will always be a major factor in determining what is possible.

The Clerk / RFO should anticipate future training needs as far as possible and discuss this with the Council and explore alternative options where appropriate. The budget needs to factor in that an unexpected new Clerk or new Councillor vacancies will increase training needs and in significantly adverse circumstances, some of this may need to be covered by general reserves. The Council should anticipate a higher likelihood of new councillor training in election years.

With constraints on available budget, the amount allocated to training will be a careful balancing act, but the Council should always factor in considerations of efficiency and effectiveness of the Council. In particular getting a new Clerk trained as quickly as possible will lead to far more efficient and effective outcomes and training will help keep both Officers and Councillors engaged, enthusiastic and committed.

### **2.2 Approval and prioritisation**

Spend on training will always need to be agreed at Full Council or delegated to the F&GP Committee when appropriate. Training requests should be provided with costs and justifications as appropriate.

When considering a training request from an individual, the Council should consider the level of importance, for example is it mandatory, desirable or optional.

Whilst no training is explicitly mandatory for a Clerk / RFO or Councillor by law, the Council has the right to treat CILCA training as mandatory in its employment contract. The Certificate in Local Council Administration qualification is a recognised qualification designed to build competence in the role. It provides a broad knowledge of essential areas such as the law, council procedures, finance, and community involvement, covering the core responsibilities of the clerk's position.

The Council should also consider it essential that the Clerk / RFO understand the law regarding GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) as the role involves use of personal data. HALC and the SLCC run short courses on this, and there are also a lot of free online training resources and reading material. Councils have a statutory obligation to comply with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. This includes having policies and processes in place and ensuring Officers are trained in their responsibilities, and so however obtained, they should make sure that new Officers are aware of the law on GDPR and what it means for them.

New officers also need an understanding of their responsibilities under employment law, equality law and health and safety law to the extent that their role requires. As the legislation

is very lengthy, the Council should ensure that the essentials are covered in their policies on these topics so that officers can quickly learn on the job.

Desirable training is not legally required for the post, but it is directly relevant to the individual's job and is likely to enhance the skills and reputation of the council. Any desirable training or qualifications are to be stated on the job description. The Council can choose whether to make CILCA desirable or obligatory. Other examples of desirable training are Cemetery Legal Compliance and Microsoft Excel or Accounting Software. In particular, management of the Cemetery involves a lot of legal requirements, and training offered by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematoria Management is strongly recommended.

An optional qualification or optional training may not be directly linked to the individual's current job. Optional training or development is generally more beneficial to the individual's career than it is for the council.

### **3. Support for Training and Qualifications**

By law since April 2020, any mandatory training or qualifications are to be stated on the job description. They should also be stated in the contract for new starters, along with whom is responsible for the costs of the training/qualifications. It should also note if there is a requirement to gain a qualification within a stipulated amount of time, or where it is required that a qualification is maintained. Where a qualification later becomes mandatory for the role, the council will provide reasonable assistance for the employee to attain the qualification.

Support for qualifications, training and personal development can include financial assistance towards the cost of training and resource materials in addition (for employees) paid time to undertake it. Any financial and non-financial support for training, qualifications and development is at the discretion of the council and needs to be discussed before agreeing to the undertaking. The Council will cover the cost of travel expenses for agreed training for employees and Councillors.

The Council has the option to make any significant payment on training above a certain level subject to full or partial repayment if the employee leaves the Council within a specified time period following completion of the course, and this (including specifics of circumstances) needs to be agreed in advance on a case by case basis, should it be applicable. As the Council is small with just one employee it seems preferable to consider each case on its merits rather than have a one-size-fits-all predetermined policy. The Council also has the right to expect repayment if the individual fails to complete the training or fails to attend without good reason.

### **4. Evaluation of training**

The Officer and Councillors should evaluate the effectiveness of training and note it in training records in order to continually improve how the Council best provides training.