



Report subject	Level 4 Community Governance training
Committee name	Finance and Establishment
Date	November 2023
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Attachments	CG Prospectus

Agenda Item 11

Summary

The purpose of this report is for committee to consider funding the level 4 Community Governance course as part of the Deputy Town Clerk's continued professional development.

Background information

As a requirement for the General Power of Competence¹, a clerk must hold a professional qualification. Most commonly, this is the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA).

The CiLCA is a Level 3 qualification, equivalent to an AS / A Level. Further sector-specific professional study for clerks and other local council officers is available through the Community Governance courses run by the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) through De Montfort University at levels 4 (certificate of higher education), 5 (foundation degree), and 6 (BA Hons degree).

The Level 4 course develops a students understanding and skills in areas including law and procedure, finance, the planning system, management, and community engagement, focussing on the practical implementation of the knowledge and skills in their day-to-day work.

Each course is undertaken part-time over two years from January to October each year. It is studied by distance learning with three 24-hour study days per year, as well as a range of online and in-person tutorials. The predominantly online delivery allows students to complete the course from home or at work.

Further information on the courses is available at: www.slcc.co.uk/qualifications/

¹ The Parish Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012, Schedule para.2(1)

The Deputy Town Clerk joined SWTC in July 2021 as Committee Clerk, completed the level 3 CiLCA qualification in May 2023 and was successfully appointed Deputy Town Clerk in July 2023.

Said the Deputy Town Clerk: *Whilst the Level 3 CiLCA qualification allowed me to understand the theory behind the day to day running of a council, its roles and responsibilities – I believe the level 4 training will allow me to further understand the role of a council for its community.*

Detailed consideration

The CiLCA provides a foundation for a clerk's training but is only a minimum requirement. An effective clerk in even a modest-sized council is required to have a deep understanding, beyond the scope of the CiLCA, across several areas, including corporate governance, finance, service delivery, estate management, and community engagement. This is essential if the council is to act dynamically and in the best interests of its community.

Whilst seminars, conferences and other training are available through the SLCC and county associations of local councils (CALCs), the Community Governance courses provide the only recognised higher education qualification for those involved in local council management.

The benefits to a council of staff undertaking the Community Governance courses include:

- A structured programme of widely-recognised continued professional development;
- Ensuring the council operates within the law and follows best practice;
- Assignments that encourage students to focus on opportunities and issues of particular concern to their community;
- Students bringing innovative ideas back to the council to support its role in serving the community;
- Greater in-house expertise, reducing expenditure on external professional fees;
- Boosting the confidence and professional credibility of the employee;
- Raising the Council's profile within the sector; and
- Increased networking and collaboration between clerks from similar councils to help address the needs of the council.

The investment required from council can include:

- a) Study time** – students are expected to undertake much of the work within their own time. However, councils are encouraged to provide study time within working hours. This study will often focus on issues of particular relevance to their council and which would require research time regardless.

A council may choose to enter into a learning agreement, whereby the student is full or part-funded but on the proviso that a certain proportion of study is carried out in their own time.

- a) Financial input** – each course costs £3,250 per year for 600 hours of study and tuition. The majority of students undertaking the course are financially supported by their councils. Whilst some of these councils opt to part-fund the training, the majority fund the entirety of the course.

Similar to point (a) above, to ensure the return on investment to councils, an agreement can be made between the council and the employee that they commit to remain with the council for a number of years following completion of the course or otherwise refund, pro rata, the costs of the course.

In the 2023/24 budget SWTC set aside £8,950 for training across employees. As of November 2023 the training budget has a remaining £1,738. Year one of training would be partly covered from this budget, with the balance covered in 2024/25.

SWTC's adopted training policy sets out where repayment of fees are required:

In the event that an employee does not complete the course, they will be required to reimburse the Town Council for 100% of any registration, course fees or exam fees. Exceptions may be granted only in extreme circumstances, for example due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances.

If an employee leaves the employment of the Town Council they will be liable to repay the Town Council the following:

100% of the fees if the employee leaves whilst still undertaking the course

75% of the fees if the employee leaves within one year of completing the course

50% of the fees if the employee leaves within two years of completing the course

Situation

The Town Clerk has completed the full six-year community governance degree (levels 4, 5 and 6).

It could be argued SWTC does not need a second level 4 trained clerk, however the level 4 syllabus will have additional direct benefits to the council, should it choose to support the recommendation. These include fully equipping the Deputy Clerk with appropriate training and skills in dealing with personnel issues, recognising the level 4 Community Governance focuses on HR/employment issues. Level 4 also focuses on planning and the role of the Town Council in the planning process. The Deputy Town Clerk administers the Council's Planning and Transport committee and the learning would be of great benefit to this committee, bringing additional expertise and knowledge to the planning committee.

In supporting her request for training, the Deputy Town Clerk writes:

- *Acknowledging my support with the planning and transport committee (including liaison with consultees and the local planning authority) the two planning assignments will support the preparation of a future neighbourhood plan and my continued work with the planning committee and LPA.*
- *I have four members of staff directly reporting to me therefore the managing people and organisational governance assignments will be hugely beneficial in supporting these employees and by continuation all members of staff and future recruitment.*
- *In any absence of the Town Clerk, I would be expected to support leading the Council and further education will ensure I am well equipped.*

Recommendation

It is recommended Committee resolves to:

- (a) support the Deputy Town Clerk in undertaking the Level 4 Community Governance course, starting 2024 (application deadline 8 December 2023) – funding the cost of the two-year course at £3,250 per annum. Study time would be carried out in her own time, aligning with the study process of the Town Clerk although time should be afforded to attend online/in-house training days (currently 2 per year).
- (b) Recognise and implement the Council's training policy.