



Campaign Pack: Making Councillor Training a Legal Requirement

Council Briefing Note

Title: Why Mandatory Councillor Training is Needed

Overview

Local councillors, those at parish and town level, are responsible for decisions that have **legal, financial, and ethical consequences**. However, training remains optional rather than mandatory.

This creates inconsistency in capability and exposes councils to easily avoidable risks.

Key Decision Areas ("Votes") Requiring Competence

Parish councils routinely take formal votes on:

1. Financial Decisions

- Setting the **annual precept**
- Approving **budgets and expenditure**
- Signing off **annual governance and accountability returns (AGAR)**

💡 *Risk:* Misunderstanding legal duties (e.g., fiduciary responsibility) can lead to audit failures, unlawful spending or wasted public money.

2. Planning and Development

- Responding to **planning applications**
- Influencing local development plans
- Considering **material planning considerations**

💡 *Risk:* Comments made without understanding planning law can be ignored, challenged, or harm the councils reputation.

3. Procurement and Contracts

- Awarding contracts for services (grounds maintenance, facilities, etc.)
- Entering into long-term agreements

💡 *Risk:* Non-compliance with procurement law or poor contract management can expose councils to legal challenge or financial loss.

4. Governance and Standards

- Handling public **complaints**
- Adhering to the **Code of Conduct**
- Managing **conflicts of interest**
- Protecting **employees**
- Data **management and security**

💡 *Risk:* Mishandling can result in formal complaints, reputational damage, and intervention by monitoring officers.

5. Asset and Land Management

- Buying, selling, or leasing land/property
- Managing community buildings and facilities

💡 *Risk:* Legal complexities around land ownership and liabilities require informed decision-making informed by public engagement.

6. Community Engagement

- Health and wellbeing impacts
- Biodiversity duties
- Social and economic wellbeing.
- Responding to local issues (speeding, play facilities, tourism, etc...)

💡 *Risk:* Reduced opportunities for the council to both identify, and respond to, community issues and improve local economic, environmental, social and health.

The Case for Mandatory Training

1. Consistency

Ensures all councillors meet a minimum standard of knowledge.

2. Risk Reduction

Mitigates legal, financial, reputational and governance risks.

3. Better Decision-Making

Improves quality of debate, outcomes and public confidence.

4. Public Confidence

Demonstrates professionalism and accountability.

5. Councillor Support

Helps new councillors navigate complex responsibilities, and keep others up to date with continual changes.

Suggested Core Training Areas

A statutory training requirement could include:

- Roles and responsibilities of councillors / local government law basics
 - Employment and HR training
 - Financial management and audit
 - Planning system fundamentals
 - Code of conduct and ethical standards
 - Community wellbeing
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Implementation Options

- Mandatory induction within 6 months of election/co-option
 - Refresher training every 3–4 years
 - Delivered via accredited bodies (e.g., county associations, NALC)
 - Online and in-person options to ensure accessibility
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Conclusion

Local councils are the **front line of democracy**, yet councillors operate without guaranteed preparation for critical decisions.

Mandatory training is a **proportionate, practical reform** that would strengthen governance, reduce risk, and improve outcomes for communities.

Template Parish Council Motion

Title: Motion: Mandatory Training for Local Councillors

Proposed wording:

This Council notes:

- That parish and town councillors increasingly make decisions with significant legal, financial, and community impact.
- That councillors are responsible for complex statutory functions, including financial oversight, planning representations, and governance compliance.
- That, unlike many public office roles and principal authority councillors, there is currently no statutory requirement for elected or co-opted councillors to undertake core training.

This Council further notes that councils regularly take decisions that require legal and procedural understanding, including:

- Setting and approving the **annual precept and budget**
- Submitting and determining **planning consultations and objections**
- Entering into **contracts and procurement decisions**
- Managing **assets and land holdings**
- Handling **complaints, codes of conduct, and standards issues**
- Employing **staff and complying with HR law**
- Improving **social, health and economic wellbeing**

This Council believes:

- That mandatory induction and ongoing training would improve governance, transparency, and public trust.
- That better-trained councillors reduce the risk of legal challenge, maladministration, and financial mismanagement.

Accordingly, this Council resolves to:

1. Call on the UK Government to introduce legislation requiring all local councillors to undertake core training within 1 year of election/co-option.
2. Request that this includes training on:
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Finance and audit
 - Planning and code of conduct
 - Social, health and economic wellbeing

- Employee protection and employer responsibilities.
- 3. Write to [Local MP] asking them to support this change.
- 4. Encourage the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and county associations to advocate for this reform.
- 5. Adopt a members training policy.

Proposed by:

Seconded by:

Date:

Template Letter to an MP

Subject: Making Training Mandatory for Local Councillors

Dear [MP Name],

I am writing on behalf of [Parish/Town Council name] following the passage of a formal motion calling for mandatory training for elected and co-opted local councillors.

Parish and town councillors routinely make decisions that carry legal, financial, and reputational risks. These include:

- Setting multi-thousand (or million) pound **precepts and budgets**
- Responding to and influencing **planning applications**
- Approving **contracts and procurement decisions**
- Managing **public assets such as land, buildings, and community facilities**
- Adjudicating on **complaints and code of conduct matters**

Despite this, there is no legal requirement for councillors to undertake even basic induction training.

This inconsistency is increasingly difficult to justify. In most other sectors, individuals with fiduciary or governance responsibilities are expected—if not required—to demonstrate baseline competence.

Mandatory training would:

- Strengthen governance and accountability
- Reduce costly errors and legal disputes
- Improve public confidence in local democracy
- Support councillors themselves in carrying out their roles effectively

We therefore ask that you:

1. Raise this issue with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2. Support or advocate for legislation introducing mandatory training requirements for councillors
3. Engage with sector bodies such as NALC to progress this reform

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Role, e.g., Chair of the Council]

Template Council Policy

Staffordshire Parish / Town Council

Members Training Policy

xxx 2026

Adoption Date: xxxx xxxx 20xx

Date for review: on or before xxxx 20xx

1. Introduction:

This policy outlines the council's approach to councillor training, funding of training and how to access it. The council and members are subject to various statutory and regulatory requirements, for example GDPR, and will equip councillors to help them and the council comply with these requirements.

The Council recognises that parish and town councillors regularly take decisions that require **legal and procedural understanding**, including:

- Setting and approving the **annual precept and budget**
- Submitting and determining **planning consultations and objections**
- Entering into **contracts and procurement decisions**
- Managing **assets and land holdings**
- Handling **complaints, codes of conduct, and standards issues**
- Improve **social, health and economic wellbeing**

Training is therefore essential to ensure that decisions are lawful, transparent and in the best interests of the community.

2. The Councils commitment to training:

The Council is committed to developing its members in order to assist the Council in achieving its objectives.

The council recognises that without training, councillors may not fully understand the powers, duties and responsibilities of the council, nor the legal and procedural framework within which decisions must be made. This is particularly important given the range and significance of decisions taken by the Council, including financial governance, planning input, contractual commitments and regulatory compliance.

The council recognises that without training, councillors may not meet their requirements to ensure good governance, lawful decision-making and accountability.

Councillor development and training is a joint commitment between the Clerk and Councillors, and by working in partnership, appropriate investment in relevant training and development will be identified and resourced.

The council recognises that training is a key part of the role of councillor and is essential in supporting informed, effective and legally compliant decision-making.

3. Equal Opportunities:

It is essential that councillors are given equal opportunity to develop their knowledge and learn new skills in order to become effective councillors.

Member development should be recognised as an integral part of the Council's business.

Councillors will have training in a format that best suits their needs.

4. The Council recognises:

New councillors will need to understand what the role entails and build up their knowledge and skills, while experienced councillors need to refresh their skills and knowledge to reflect ever-changing legislation and best practice.

This is particularly important given that councillors are required to make decisions on matters such as:

- Financial planning and accountability (including precept setting)
- Planning matters and development proposals
- Procurement and contractual agreements
- Asset and land management
- Governance, complaints and standards

The Council recognises that continued investment and commitment to training and development are essential if **quality services, effective governance and transparency** are to be provided, maintained and continually improved.

Members receiving training on specific subjects (for example planning, data protection, governance, etc.) is of significant value to the Council and its residents.

5. The Council will provide:

A training budget for member training.

All members will receive a Councillor induction pack within 1 month of taking their seat.

All new members will be given the opportunity to attend a new councillor training course.

All members are encouraged to attend further training.

All Members will be kept informed of relevant training courses especially those offered by the County Association of Local Councils.

All Councillors will be invited to meet with the Clerk/Manager and visit the Council's properties/assets to further understand the Councils assets and liabilities.

6. Structured training:

Members will attend training that reflects the key decision-making responsibilities of the Council, particularly in relation to finance, planning, governance, procurement and asset management.

Members will attend the following training courses as part of their induction process.

- Councillor introduction/Fundamentals
- Data Protection
- Financial Control / Audit

Members will aspire to attend the following courses over their term of office -

- Planning Training
- Councillor
- Chairmanship Training
- Business Planning
- Community Engagement

Members will also seek other courses provided by the SPCA, SLCC, NALC, etc.. that they believe will benefit them, their knowledge, experience and ability to serve on the council and strengthen its governance.

7. Accessing Training

Any member wishing to attend any training courses or event should discuss the training with the Clerk.

Members will be able to claim back costs incurred for training, such as travel.