

5. Chapter 5 - Training Plans

5.1. Community councils and their staff should seek to equip themselves to be as effective and efficient as possible when exercising functions. Councils should regularly review whether there are opportunities to improve their administration and governance so that they are better able to perform their responsibilities and serve their communities. Having identified development gaps, the next step is to develop a plan to address these gaps.

5.2. Section 67 of the 2021 Act requires community councils to make and publish a plan about the training provision for its members and staff. The first training plan must be ready and published by 5 November 2022, six months after the duty comes into force. This is considered to be an appropriate period of time for councils to assess needs, agree its training budget and adopt a plan.

5.3. The training plan should reflect on, and address, whether the council collectively has the skills and knowledge it needs to deliver its plans most effectively.

Purpose of the training plan

5.4. Planning for the provision of training can be carried out in a proportionate way, taking into account factors such as the activities undertaken by that council, the current expertise of councillors and clerks and the nature and significance of any training needs identified. Overall, the intention is that the preparation of a training plan would support councillors to have the relevant training to carry out their role - as well as professional clerks and other employees.

Training needs analysis

5.5. In order to determine the training priorities for the community council, it is necessary to assess the essential skills needed by the council and whether the council feels there is sufficient coverage and depth across the council. The full list of essential skills will depend on the activities within the council. For instance, a council intending to exercise the GPoC may find it essential that councillors are familiar with preparing a business case or setting up a business.

5.6. There are areas which *all* councils should ensure that they have sufficient skills and understanding. These are:

- Basic induction for councillors;
- The Code of Conduct for members of local authorities in Wales; and
- Financial management and governance.

5.7. In addition to these areas, the council will want to consider if there are new challenges and opportunities it may wish to explore, such as those offered by the GPoC. In which case, it may decide there are new skills for councillors and clerks to attain.

5.8. A number of training analysis templates are available online to help councils determine their own approach to analysing training needs. The most basic approach would list those essential skills identified above and by the council, and ask individual councillors and staff to self-appraise a level of competence e.g. between one and four (where four is fully proficient). The council can use that information to determine its training needs and then its collective training priorities.

5.9. The next stage is to determine what steps it will take to address relevant skills gaps and prioritise accordingly.

Agreeing and publishing the training plan

5.10. The training plan should reflect the training needs of the council and its plan for addressing those needs. The plan must be approved by the full council prior to publication. The plan should provide, as a minimum, information about:

- The type of training;
- Numbers participating;
- The timeframe over which the training is expected to be completed; and
- The overall cost of the training.

5.11. The National Training Advisory Group (NTAG) for the community and town council sector publishes a strategy for securing sufficient and relevant training provision for councils. It details the courses available and support materials. The council is likely to find this information helpful in determining opportunities to address training needs. As of publication of this document, the NTAG Wales Training Strategy is due to be updated.

5.12. Councils may want to consider the broader range of opportunities to build expertise including formal and informal training, such as shadowing other councillors or staff, or online learning.

5.13. Training costs must be met by councils themselves, although bursary schemes for councillors and clerks may be available to subsidise these costs. Part of the costs of running an effective council includes ensuring that the members and staff have sufficient capability to carry out their functions effectively. Councils should take account of the training costs when setting their budgets.

5.14. Smaller councils, in particular, may wish to share training plans with neighbouring councils to identify any common training requirements that could be negotiated on a larger group basis and potentially reduce the training costs for all.

5.15. The published training plan should not seek to name individuals without their consent. Where this is impossible, e.g. there is one member of staff, the training plan should focus on what the training priorities are rather than who they are for.

Training for employees of more than one community council

5.16. A single clerk may act in this capacity for more than one community council. Other staff may also work across multiple community councils. It is recommended that community councils take a pragmatic approach to meeting the training needs. For instance, councils could agree collectively what training such staff are to receive and how the costs may be shared between the councils. This could be recorded in the training plans of all councils affected, although care would need to be taken to prevent the information identifying a particular individual.

Review of training plans

5.17. Under section 67(4) of the 2021 Act there is a duty on councils to review their training plan from time to time.

5.18. As a minimum this would be at least at every ordinary election of community councillors. Under section 67(3) of the 2021 Act, once the first plan is published, subsequent plans must be prepared within three months of an ordinary election of community councillors

5.19. In practice, the plan is likely to require revising more frequently, for example, following a council by-election or a new co-opted councillor joining; staff changes; or taking on new responsibilities such as new services or assets.

5.20. Where a council revises or replaces its training plan, under section 67(5) of the 2021 Act, the council must publish the revised or new plan.

Publication

5.21. The publication of the council's training plan should be consistent with the wider approach to publication required by the 2021 Act and be published electronically