

260818 – Item 10 - Community Governance Level 4 Qualification

1. Purpose of the Report

To present information on the Level 4 Certificate of Higher Education in Community Governance (SLCC/DMU) and to invite the Finance & Policy Committee to consider whether to recommend that Full Council funds the Clerk's enrolment for the 2027 intake.

2. Background

The Community Governance qualification is the sector's only higher-education programme designed specifically for parish and town council officers. It builds on Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) and provides structured, accredited learning in governance, law, finance, community development, and organisational leadership.

Key features:

- Awarded by De Montfort University (DMU)
- Two-year distance learning programme (February–November each year).
- Includes three residential 24-hour study days per year.
- Provides 120 CPD points over two years.
- Coursework directly linked to real council work, including a dissertation.
- Entry requirements: CiLCA and GCSE grade C or above in English and Maths.

A new benefit for 2027 students includes 50% off SLCC webinars and themed summits during each study year.

3. Course Content

Modules covered across the two-year programme:

- Community Governance
- Local Council Finance
- Community-Led Planning *or* The Planning System
- Organisational Governance
- Local Council Law and Procedures
- Building Communities

- Managing People or Managing Projects

Study expectations:

- Approx. 150 hours per module (around 3 hours per week).
- Online tutorials, webinars, discussion forums, and access to DMU library resources.
- Three residential study days per year.

4. Costs and Financial Implications

Total fee: £8,000 (£4,000 per year) Deposit: £400 (non-refundable, payable at application) Fees expected to increase for the 2027 intake.

Course fees include:

- Course materials
- Teaching and tutorials
- Residential study days
- Online learning environment
- DMU registration and student support services
- Access to university libraries and digital resources

Additional costs (not included in tuition):

- Travel to residential study days
- Books and supplementary materials
- Any optional SLCC events beyond the discounted webinars/summits

Student finance is not available.

5. Budget Considerations

The Committee is asked to consider:

- Whether the training budget for 2027/28 and 2028/29 can accommodate the cost.
- Whether to recommend funding from:
 - the training budget,
 - earmarked reserves, or
 - general reserves.

- Whether to recommend a training agreement (e.g., repayment clause if the Clerk leaves within two years of completing the qualification).
- Whether to recommend funding the full cost or a phased approach over two financial years.

The qualification is a legitimate use of council funds under professional development and governance improvement.

6. Benefits to the Council

The programme provides direct value to the Council's governance, compliance, and operational resilience:

- Strengthened legal and procedural compliance through advanced study of local council law and governance frameworks.
- Improved financial management, procurement understanding, and audit readiness.
- Enhanced policy development and strategic planning, supporting clearer reports, business cases, and operational procedures.
- Better community engagement and project management, supporting local initiatives and partnerships.
- Direct application to current council work, improving quality and efficiency.
- Long-term organisational resilience, ensuring the Council has a professionally qualified Clerk with sector-specific higher-education training.

These benefits align with the Committee's remit to ensure strong governance, value for money, and organisational capability.

7. Clerk's Preliminary Research and Next Steps

To ensure the Council has full and accurate information before committing funds, the Clerk has booked onto the SLCC introductory session:

Embarking on Community Governance – Is It Right For Me?

Date: Friday 4 September 2026

Time: 13:30–14:30

Location: Microsoft Teams (Virtual Event)

This session will provide detailed insight into the qualification, workload expectations, residential study days, and the 2027 intake structure. A short verbal update can be provided to the Committee or Full Council following the session, should members wish.

8. Follow-Up on Staffing Committee Suggestion (Clerk's Appraisal)

At the Clerk's most recent appraisal, the Staffing Committee suggested exploring government-funded apprenticeships as a potential alternative route for professional development.

In response, the Clerk reviewed the national apprenticeship directory:

Find Apprenticeship Training:

<https://findapprenticeshiptraining.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/courses>

This search confirmed that, although a wide range of apprenticeships exist across business administration, leadership, management, and public service roles, none are sector-specific to parish or town council governance. No apprenticeships were identified that cover:

- Local council law and procedures
- Parish/town council finance and audit
- Governance frameworks specific to local councils
- Community-led planning
- Sector-specific organisational governance
- Clerk-specific statutory duties

As a result, the apprenticeship options do not provide the specialist knowledge, accreditation, or sector alignment required for the Clerk's role. The SLCC/DMU Community Governance qualification remains the only recognised higher-education pathway designed specifically for local council officers.

9. Risks and Mitigation

Risk	Mitigation
Financial cost	Investment improves governance, compliance, and organisational resilience.
Time commitment	Clerk will manage study time outside core operational hours; workload manageable.
Staff retention	Committee may recommend a training agreement to safeguard investment.

10. Recommendation to the Finance & Policy Committee

That the Committee considers the information provided and determines whether to recommend to Full Council that:

1. The Clerk enrolls on the Community Governance Level 4 qualification (2027 intake).
2. The Council funds the full course fees of £8,000, plus the £400 deposit and reasonable associated study costs.
3. The Clerk is authorised to submit an application for the February 2027 start date.
4. (Optional) A training agreement is adopted to protect the Council's investment.

11. Committee Decision Required

The Committee is asked to make a recommendation to Full Council on whether to approve funding for the Clerk's enrolment on the Community Governance Level 4 qualification.