



**Standards Committee
9 December 2014**

**Report from the Director of
Legal and Procurement**

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

**Review of the Member Development Programme and
Members' Expenses**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Standards Committee with a review of the rolling Member Development Programme and provides information regarding the updated Members' Expenses Scheme.
- 1.2 This report outlines the member learning and development sessions delivered for members since May 2014, and also the upcoming winter quarter of the member learning and development programme (January-April 2014).

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the content of this report.

3.0 Detail – Member Development

- 3.1 The Member Development Programme was last reviewed by this Committee on 9 January 2014; that review covered the period May 2012 to January 2014. In addition to review by members of the Standards Committee, the member learning and development programme is regularly monitored by the Member Development Steering Group on a quarterly basis.
- 3.2 The steering group provides invaluable member input into the future programme. The scope of that Committee is to consider the type of training provided and attendance at the training, and consider and discuss any implications with regards maintaining high standards of conduct and good practice.

Development events May 2014 – November 2014:

- 3.3 During the quarter immediately prior to the local elections in May 2014 (January-April), the programme was temporarily suspended, in recognition that the demands on members' time during this period did not reasonably allow for attendance at training sessions. This practice was also followed in 2010.
- 3.4 Following the local elections, a significant number of member development events were held between May 2014 and November 2014. These have been delivered mostly by internal officers and partners, with some external facilitators :
- Member Induction evening – 27 May 2014
 - I.T. training sessions – 3 and 26 June 2014
 - Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing training – 9 June 2014
 - Planning Committee training – 12 June 2014
 - Local Government Finance – 25 June 2014
 - Regeneration and Housing 'issues seminar' – 30 June 2014
 - Casework and Member Enquiries session: 'If I'd Known Then What I Know Now' – 3 July 2014
 - Regeneration tour of the borough – 7 July 2014 (daytime)
 - Scrutiny Committee member training – 7 July 2014 (evening)
 - Conduct in Public Office – 9 July 2014
 - Veolia and the Public Realm Contract – 15 July 2014
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Children – 22 July 2014
 - Adults, Health and Well-Being – 30 July 2014
 - Scrutiny Committee member training – 31 July 2014
 - Employment and Skills 'issues seminar' – 3 September 2014
 - Stronger Communities 'issues seminar' – 10 September 2014
 - Licensing Policy review – 16 September 2014
 - Casework and Member Enquiries session: 'If I'd Known Then What I Know Now' (repeat) – 23 September 2014
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Children (repeat) and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation – 30 September 2014
 - Equalities Strategy – 8 October 2014
 - The Borough Plan – 13 October 2014 (daytime)
 - The Borough Plan – 22 October 2014 (evening)
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults – 29 October 2014
 - Mentor/mentee facilitation session for Majority group members – 30 October 2014
 - Questioning Skills – 11 November 2014
 - Revenues and Benefits – 13 November 2014
 - Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing training (repeat) – 18 November 2014
 - Housing Needs briefing – 20 November 2014

- Chairing Skills – 25 November 2014

Further scheduled sessions:

- School Place Planning – 3 December 2014
- Clinical Commissioning Group briefing – 15 January 2015
- Individual Electoral Registration – 4 February 2015
- Social Media protocol – 17 February 2015
- Immigration briefing – 25 February 2015
- Brent Housing Partnership briefing – 3 March 2015
- Intermediate level I.T. training – 10 March 2015
- Regeneration tour of the borough – 14 March 2015 (daytime)
- Special Education Needs provision – 19 March 2015
- Challenging Prejudice – 30 March 2015
- Employment Skills and Enterprise Strategy – 9 April 2015.

Attendance at internal training events

3.5 Member attendance at internal learning and development sessions has varied for each session during the May – October period (see attached as Appendix One). Overall Member attendance, has been encouraging. Of the 24 sessions delivered during the May-October period, 19 sessions were attended by 10 members or more. 30 members have attended 6 or more sessions; however, 3 members yet to attend a sessions.

3.6 Other than the initial induction evening following the local elections in May which was attended by 59 members, the best attended sessions were the ‘Safeguarding Vulnerable Children’ sessions, which were mandatory for members newly elected in May 2014. Additionally, training for licensing and planning committee members is now compulsory having regard to the regulatory nature of those committees; for planning, the requirement is set out in the revised planning codes approved by this committee in March 2014.

3.7 Sessions with the lowest attendance tended to be those aimed at specific committees, possibly because councillors who are not members of that committee do not consider it is aimed at them.

Alternatively, the low attendance at the Licensing Policy Review session may have been due to the training already delivered to the members of the Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Committee, who may have felt that their training needs in that area had already been met.

3.8 There do not appear to be any other particular trends relating to subject matter or the timing of the courses which would assist in identifying further why some members choose not to attend training sessions.

- 3.9 Currently the Member Development Programme is advertised quarterly to all members via the weekly Members' Information Bulletin. Reminders are issued on a weekly basis, also via the Members' Information Bulletin. Despite this, some members have voiced concerns that they have been unaware of the dates in advance. I.T. have been asked to assist with a programme of electronic invites which would automatically enter members' diaries once accepted, and an outcome on this is anticipated in the near future, in time to go live when booking attendance for the winter quarter of the programme January - April.
- 3.10 It should be noted as that, in addition to the system of electronic invites, members will still have the opportunity to make bookings directly by emailing the Member Development Manager, the Head of Executive and Member Service or the political group offices. It is currently possible for members to attend the vast majority of sessions without booking in advance, and there is also no sanction for members who do not attend following confirmation being received.

Attendance at external events May 2014 – November 2014:

- 3.11 A number of external events have been attended by members since May 2014. The organisers have included the Greater London Authority (GLA), the Local Government Association (LGA), London Councils, the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), the National Housing Federation and 4Children Ltd. Programme content has included the Early Years Pupil Premium, the London Development Conference examining housing provision in the capital, a Safeguarding London's Children conference, the use of social media and the Local Government Summit.

Feedback from members regarding the member development programme:

- 3.12 Feedback is sought from members following each training event attended, both internal and external. The feedback received after attendance at internal events has been largely positive. 19 members completed online evaluation forms following sessions between 12 June 2014 and 24 September 2014. Of those 19 responses, the results are as follows:
- 95% found the event covered what they expected.
 - Of the question 'how would you rate the trainers' 95% of respondents rated them satisfactory, good or excellent.
 - Of the question 'how much new information did you learn' 95% of respondents felt they had learned a medium, significant or high level of new information.
 - Of the question 'how relevant was the event for you' 90% of respondents felt the event was relevant, quite relevant or very relevant.

- Of the question 'how would you rate the event overall' 84% of respondents rated the event satisfactory, good or excellent.

There was also constructive feedback, including:

- 'Some new information but not as useful as I had hoped'
- 'Gave some interesting information but need more time'
- 'Too broad an area for a single event – break it down into bite size pieces'
- 'I have a somewhat better understanding of Housing and Regeneration...'

No feedback has been received following attendance at external events.

Organisational and political support:

- 3.13 The Member Development Steering Group was reconstituted following the local elections in May 2014, and first met on 8 October 2014. Chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council (Cabinet Member for Member Services), discussions focused on a review of the induction programme and subsequent attendance at all internal development events to date, an evaluation of member feedback and consideration of items for inclusion in future quarters of the programme. The Steering Group's Terms of Reference are attached for information as Appendix Two.
- 3.14 The Steering Group has consistently provided constructive input and evaluation during previous terms of office and it is anticipated this support will continue. A strong political lead on member development from all groups is essential to ensure member ownership of the programme.

Member Development Charter Award

- 3.15 Re-accreditation for the Member Development Charter Award was successfully achieved in January 2014. The report from the assessors, South East Employers, is attached as Appendix Three. Only five London councils have been awarded the Charter – Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Islington, Richmond upon Thames and Southwark.
- 3.16 Feedback from the Charter assessors indicated that Brent would have an excellent chance of achieving Charter Plus, regarded as the gold standard for good practice in the field of member development. The requirements for achieving Charter Plus are detailed in Appendix Three.
- 3.17 No other London authority has yet achieved Charter Plus status. Consideration should be given to submitting an application for an

assessment for Charter Plus in order to build on Brent's good standards in the area of member development.

4.0 Detail – Members' Expenses

- 4.1 The 2014 review of allowances was the first significant consideration of the Members' Allowances Scheme in Brent for over 4 years and, following the local elections in May 2014, a number of changes to update the scheme were needed to make the scheme fit for purpose. Until recently, the London Borough of Brent Members' Allowances Scheme made provision for the payment of travel expenses to members. At its meeting on 8 September 2014, the full Council decided to delete this provision. At the same meeting, it was agreed that a Dependents' Carers' allowance be made available to members. The criteria for making a Dependents' Carers' claim is detailed in Section 4.2.

Changes to the Members' Allowances Scheme were agreed at the meeting of the full Council in September 2014. The changes included an increase in the basic allowance for all members, an increase in some Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs), the creation of new SRAs for positions which previously had none, and the deletion of some positions for which an SRA was previously payable.

The full list of allowances is included as Appendix Four.

- 4.2 The changes which were agreed made provision for members to claim a Dependents' Carers' Allowance to facilitate their attendance at meetings. The wording for this is as follows:

'Dependants' Carers' Allowance

A dependants' carers' allowance may be claimed by a councillor in respect of such expenses of arranging for the care of their children or dependants as are necessarily incurred in the attendance at meetings or the performance of functions of a type specified in Schedule 2 provided that:

i) the allowance will be for reimbursement only of the reasonable costs of such care which shall be equal to the hourly rate of the London Living Wage (unless special care is required and approved); and

ii) approval of the claim is sought from the Head of Executive and Member Services prior to the meeting.'

- 4.3 The Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager is responsible for administering the Members' Allowances Scheme and will oversee the receipt, processing and payment of all appropriate Dependents' Carers' claims submitted by members. To date, no such claims have been made.

- 4.4 In September 2014, full Council also agreed, in acknowledgement of the increases made to the allowances within the scheme, that the travel allowance and other expenses currently provided for within the scheme be deleted. The previous provision for members to claim travel expenses for travel to and from events in connection to their role as councillor (outside of the borough) was deleted. No travel expenses have been claimed since the Standards Committee last scrutinised expenses claims on 8 January 2014.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The costs of the member learning and development programme are met from a budget of £17,352 annually. An additional amount was made available for this current financial year in recognition that the forecast costs of an induction year would significantly exceed the current budget.
- 5.2 Such costs included the services of an external consultant to deliver the Members' Needs Analysis (MNA) project, as well as external facilitators who have delivered specific skill sessions including Scrutiny training, Questioning Skills and Chairing Skills, as well as a separate Cabinet development programme.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 None for the Member Development Programme.
- 6.2 The Local Government (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, as amended, requires the council to have the records available for public inspection. During the period 1 May 2013 to 1 April 2014 no member of the public came to inspect the records.
- 6.3 The Local Government (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, as amended, requires publication in a locally-circulating newspaper following any amendment to the scheme. A notice was duly published in the Wembley Observer on 2 October 2014.

7.0 Diversity Implications

- 7.1 There are positive diversity implications arising from the provision for a Dependents' Carers' allowance for members. This will facilitate the attendance of members at meetings they may not otherwise have been able to attend.

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