	Standards Committee Wednesday, 26 March 2008 **Report from the Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager**
For Information	Wards Affected: NONE

Review of the Member Development Programme May 2006 – April 2008

1.0 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the Member Development Programme since the local elections in May 2006. This report outlines the background to the Member Development Programme, activity and achievements since 2006, constraints for the programme and future opportunities.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note this report

3.0 Detail

3.1 <u>Background</u>

The Member Development Programme was established in spring 2003. At that time the council stated that it would 'assist councillors in their new roles under the new constitution and would help to identify individual training and development needs to help members fulfil their responsibilities to the local community'.

To this end, a programme was established with three main strands that addressed:

- *Role development* covering how members could develop in their particular roles within the council

- *Technical skills* examining the way the council works within specific service areas and covering any legislative changes which affect local government
- *Personal skills* looking at developing the skills needed for councillors to perform duties more effectively in the council and community.

From June 2003 to May 2006 the programme provided 41 structured training and developmental events. In addition, councillors attended a number of conferences and other external training opportunities, for example the Leadership Academy run by the Improvement and Development Agency. The demand for external courses was very low, (1 or 2 per year), and therefore any reasonable requests were granted.

During this period the Member Development Programme was short listed for two national awards. This demonstrated that Brent was well ahead of other councils in the terms of the sophistication and structure of the programme.

Although 41 events were held during the period June 2003 to May 2006 they were not spread evenly. Leading up to election times, there was a marked decrease in the number of councillors signing up for events and in many cases courses had to be postponed. There was no structured member development programme in the lead up to the local elections in May 2006. During this time efforts were focussed on planning for the next induction period during this time.

3.2   Activity and achievements since May 2006

Induction

The local elections in May 2006 introduced 27 new councillors onto the council. The formal induction programme consisted of:

- *Welcome reception* where councillors were able to sign the declaration of acceptance of office, have their official photographs taken and received a briefing from the Borough Solicitor on the code of conduct.
- *Induction day* which took place on the second Sunday after the election and included presentations from Directors and others.
- *Members' handbook* is a short booklet explaining all the key information needed by councillors and given to them at the induction day event.
- *Service specific induction sessions* were held in the weeks immediately following the induction day. Eight briefings were held over four sessions covering all the main service areas as well as specialised briefings, for example members IT.

The induction programme was well received by members and attendance at events was good.

Personal development plans

After the induction sessions were completed the focus shifted to completing Personal Development Plans (PDPs). Initial work on completing the PDPs highly successful and we completed this process well ahead of a significant number of other London authorities. To date 50 councillors have undergone personal development interviews which is critical not only in terms of identifying needs but also in engaging members in the process of working up the programme.

Main structured programme

Since September 2006 a new structured programme has been developed as a result of the issues raised in the PDPs and in discussions with senior managers. The programme also continues to be loosely structured around the three original themes of personal skills, technical skills and role development.

Events that have been held from May 2006 to February 2008 are:

- Induction day
- Induction sessions
- Media Awareness Session for Executive Members
- Budget Scrutiny Panel Training
- Overview and Scrutiny Training
- Chairing Skills for new Members and Chairs of ACFs
- Understanding Housing & Locata
- Planning Awareness & Planning Committee Training
- Alcohol & Entertainment Licensing/Gambling Act seminar
- Adoption Training
- Brent Pension Fund Training
- IT Drop-In Session
- New Responsibilities for Overview & Scrutiny
- Speed reading and flexible reading strategies for councillors
- Implications of the then local government and public involvement in health bill
- Communicating effectively and assertively training session
- Equalities and diversity workshop
- Influencing others and handling conflict training session
- Neighbourhood working – how does it work in practice?
- Climate Change and what we can do about it in Brent

Other activity

Since May 2006, there has been a substantial increase in requests for attendance at external conferences and seminars. To date most requests, (as long as they can be shown to meet personal development needs or are linked to strands of the corporate strategy),

have been granted and been accommodated within the budgetary constraints of the member development programme. This has included a number of councillors attending the Leadership Academy and Leadership Centre programmes. However it is likely that with increasing budgetary constraints that in the future not all requests will be able to be granted.   Consequently work is currently underway on drawing up guidance on attendance at external events.

Other member development activity has revolved around mentoring/peer support. Some executive members have collectively participated in mentoring, and additional individual mentoring has been provided to other lead members.

Feedback from members and attendance
Feedback is collected from all events that members attend. To date most of the feedback on events has been positive. When the next set of PDPs are carried out this will provide an opportunity for councillors to reflect on their learning as a whole.

Attendance at events continues to be variable. Attendance at events that are open to all members rarely exceeds 12. Much work goes into the development and running of these sessions, so ideally more councillors would attend these events to make them worthwhile.

3.3. **Constraints**

Time constraints of councillors

Despite a number of ring fenced dates in the official meetings calendar for member development, time constraints continue to be raised as a problem.

In terms of time available for member development sessions, there is only approximately one date per month dedicated to this activity. Each session can only last a couple of hours in the evening and the depth to which issues can be covered is limited. However this is not to say that even with limited time that events can not be of a high quality. Other sessions are fitted in around other meetings.

The original member development charter states that members should try and attend a minimum of five sessions per year. In Brent since 2003 we have only averaged about half of this (the fact that there has been so many elections within this time could go some way to explaining this).

Elections

As mentioned above there was a significant drop in member development activity in the run up to elections. This happened with the general election in May 2005, by-elections in June 2005 and then in the

lead up to the local elections 2006. There were no member development events from January 2006 until after the local elections.

There are likely to be further issues in the lead up to the GLA elections in May 2008, and any general election which is called before May 2010. Consideration therefore needs to be made in terms of activity during these periods.

<u>Political support</u>

Increasing attention is being paid to developing the role of councillors. This has been highlighted in various recent reports such as 'Representing the future - the report of the Councillors Commission' and 'The role of councillors – the report of an inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group'.

Prior to May 2006 a cross-party working group was in place to discuss member development issues on an ad-hoc basis. However since the election, this has ceased to meet. A firm political lead on member development from all groups is needed, if attendance and participation in the programme is to improve.

3.4. **Next steps**

<u>Structured programme</u>

The member development programme will continue to provide a structured programme based on the needs identified in personal development interviews and other organisational and legislative issues that arise. Proposed future events will include:

- Further communications skills for councillors
- Developing Member Officer Relationships
- Investigation and questioning skills for scrutiny
- Developing the roles of overview and scrutiny members
- Advanced presentation skills
- Getting the most out of meetings
- Role of opposition councillors (Labour)
- Role of non-exec members (Liberal Democrat)
- Role of non-exec members (Conservative)
- Further service area briefings including planning, finance and housing

<u>Other opportunities</u>

Much of the work since May 2006 has concentrated on skills and knowledge. More work now needs to be done in terms of supporting councillors in their roles. Some peer support has been given to the executive, but additional work also needs to be done to develop the

roles of opposition, non-executive, and members involved in overview and scrutiny.

4.0   Financial Implications

4.1   The costs of the member development programme are met from allocated budgets within the overall Communications and Consultation Unit. The total cost of the member development programme was approximately £14,000 in each of the financial years covered by this report.

5.0   Legal Implications

5.1   None

6.0   Diversity Implications

6.1   None

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