



**Audit and Standards Advisory  
Committee**  
31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

**Report from the Assistant Chief  
Executive**

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

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	Four: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appendix 1 – Draft Learning and Development Programme 2021-22</li> <li>• Appendix 2 – Feedback report on the Member Learning and Development programme</li> <li>• Appendix 3 - LB Brent Charter Plus Interim Review</li> <li>• Appendix 4 - Member Expenses, 2019-2020</li> </ul>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Katie Smith, Head of Executive and Member Services Tel: 020 8937 1399 Email: <a href="mailto:katie.smith@brent.gov.uk">katie.smith@brent.gov.uk</a>  Michelle Sylva Member Support Officer Tel: 020 8937 5447 Email: <a href="mailto:Michelle.Sylva@brent.gov.uk">Michelle.Sylva@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee with a summary of the Member Learning Development Programme since the last report to Committee in January 2020; and information regarding the Members' Expenses Scheme. It also provides, at Appendix 1, an overview of upcoming member learning and development sessions.

## 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee notes the work being undertaken by the Member Learning and Development Steering Group in ensuring effective training and development for Brent's elected representatives.

- 2.2 That the Committee notes the expenses claimed by Members in the course of their work in 2019-2020 (Appendix 4).

### **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 Members of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee last reviewed the Member Development Programme on 20 January 2020. The Committee also considered a report on mandatory training on 8 December 2020. That review covered the period from May 2018 to December 2020.

- 3.2 In addition to the annual review by members of the Standards and Audit Advisory Committee, the member learning and development programme is monitored quarterly by the cross party Member Learning and Development Steering Group. The scope of that Group is to consider the type of training provided, review attendance at each session and consider any requests and suggestions for training from Members, in particular requests for external training with a cost implication.

- 3.3 The Member Learning and Development Steering Group provides constructive input and evaluation of the programme. A strong political lead on member development from all groups is essential to ensure member ownership of the programme.

### **4.0 Member learning and development programme and the Impact of Covid-19**

- 4.1 Since the last report to the Committee on 20 January 2020, the Council has organised and delivered thirty-nine Member learning and development sessions, fourteen of which were delivered face-face and twenty-five were delivered virtually on Zoom. Since March 2020, eleven of the thirty-nine sessions provided have been mandatory. Members who were unable to attend the original mandatory training sessions were required to attend a repeat session.

- 4.2 Training has continued during the Covid-19 pandemic but delivered entirely via Zoom and with a focus on a) Member roles during the pandemic and b) training in Microsoft Teams and Zoom to ensure effective participation at virtual meetings. All 63 Members of the Council now have access to Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Training was provided on conduct at remote meetings and how to chair a remote meeting (see para 4.12). This has supported the democratic processes of the Council to be able to continue with most Committees meeting in public via Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

- 4.3 The Covid-19 pandemic has led to the postponement of some Member Learning and Development training sessions. Some training events will be carried over into the 2021/22 municipal year and a draft programme is attached at Appendix 1.

#### **Member attendance**

- 4.4 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a mixed impact on the council's ability to support member learning. It has been more difficult to deliver skills-based training as that benefits from face to face sessions. However, imparting

knowledge via virtual sessions has worked well and overall there has been a significant rise in attendance, with sessions attracting on average 30 members each and up to 45 for some.

- 4.5 The Council has opted to deliver its Member Learning and Development sessions via Zoom and has benefited from the governance team's advice on how to get the best out of the platform. Members and officers are now very comfortable with the system, there have been no security breaches and, in general, sessions are highly interactive as members get used to using the hands up and chat function as well as contributing orally.
- 4.6 Member attendance at internal learning and development sessions has varied for each session during the current municipal year. Reminders are issued on a weekly basis via outlook calendar invitations, text messages and email, weekly members' information bulletin.
- 4.7 Aside from the mandatory sessions, the training with the highest attendance were: the *Poverty Commission* member briefing, *Sustainability Strategy - Climate Emergency* and the *Unconscious Bias - Interrupting bias* workshop. All three had attendance of over forty Members. The next most attended sessions were the *Local Government Finance and the Budget* and *Customer Access and Digital Services* briefings. Over 30 Members attended both the sessions.
- 4.8 All Members have now undertaken and completed all mandatory training. At the last full council in February 2021, it was agreed to add Equalities and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), to the list of mandatory training in the Brent Members' Code of Conduct. The GDPR e-learning is presently being undertaken by Members. To date, over 40 Members have completed this e-learning course.

#### **Elected Members Induction Day – 27 January 2020**

- 4.9 Four Members were elected to Brent Council at by-elections held on 24 January 2020. The core induction session for the new members was delivered on 27 January 2020. It was based on the 2018 Member induction, and provided key information, support, resources and training for the new members. The four newly elected Members were given a welcome pack of basic information, IT equipment including forms to complete.
- 4.10 The programme focused initially on a general introduction to the Council and core issues including mandatory trainings, with the objective that, by the end of the programme, Members would have a better knowledge of all the Council's service areas and immediate challenges and priorities. The approach to induction was evaluated as part of the survey of members, discussed below and at Appendix 2.

#### **Chairing and Presentation skills for Remote Meetings**

- 4.11 In response to requests from a number of Councillors, the Member Learning and Development Working Group arranged a Chairing and Presentation skills for Remote Meetings course for Members. This course was offered and delivered by an external trainer in September 2020.

- 4.12 The course was targeted at chairs of committees and cabinet members as well as Members who wished to refresh and enhance their skills at chairing and attending meetings, whether formal council meetings or local community meetings. The aim of this session was to explore with Members the different challenges of chairing remote meetings and to identify different skills required and some practical approaches to ensure the meeting goes well. Members who attended were also signposted to useful sources of support/guidance and good practice.

### **External Training Events**

- 4.13 Attendance at external training events has been more limited in 2020 due to Covid-19. Our external training partners have also had to refocus their support to councils to ensure their resources are best placed to help with immediate challenges. Since March 2020, Members have only attended a limited number of external training events delivered by organisations including the Local Government Association (LGA), London Councils, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU).
- 4.14 The Member Learning and Development working group considers all attendance at external sessions.

### **Feedback**

- 4.15 Feedback has been crucial to shaping and developing the member development programme. In August 2020, a survey was sent to all Members to gather views on the council's Member Learning and Development programme past and future. Members were asked to give details of any training events that they would like to see in the programme for 2020/21 and their preferred method of communication.
- 4.16 The detailed feedback data is attached as Appendix 2. In summary:
- Nearly a third of councillors responded to the survey
  - the ways in which the council communicates with members were positively received.
    - Additional suggestions included the introduction of a messaging facility for urgent updates; more information to be provided which can be directly passed on to residents; and a call for more financial information in relation to the council
  - a range of suggestions for specific training included sessions on the Black Community Action Plan and Poverty Commission, and skills sessions on using information technology. All of these have been actioned.
  - Members were specifically asked what further training they needed on Brent's constitution which informed sessions on that topic to prepare Members for future meetings of Full Council.
  - There were strong preferences for continuing to provide training virtually, for Zoom to be continued to be used, and for the training to take place in the evening.
  - Members felt very positive that the Council had supported them well to work remotely and made a few specific suggestions for improvements.

## **5.0 Member Development Charter Award – Gold Standard interim assessment – 9 October 2020**

5.1 Brent Council's approach to member learning is regularly reviewed by an external assessor to check our approach is effective and informed by practice elsewhere. The Council was most recently assessed in October 2020 to ensure that the Council was continuing to make progress as part of the award of its London Charter for Elected Member Development Charter Plus – Gold Standard.

5.2 In summary, the feedback was positive, highlighting the Council's continued success and commitment to member development. The assessor identified that there continues to be strong support for councillor development across the organisation and a key political lead led by the high profile Member Development Steering Group.

5.3 The following areas were suggested for improvement:

- That Brent Council continues to ensure that the Personal Development conversations continue with councillors on a two yearly basis following the election and a two-year interim refresh. A target of 60% plus of councillors having a PDP and personal development conversation should be aimed for.
- Consideration should be given to councillors' resilience and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on councillors' wellbeing. Support and action to be led by the MDSG.
- A whole Council Councillor mentoring programme of support with trained mentors should be considered to be in place by the 2022 elections. Councillors more recently elected in a by-election (January 2020) should be provided with an internal mentor as soon as possible.

5.4 The full report is attached as appendix 3 and the next reassessment visit will take place in December 2021.

## **6.0 Members' expenses**

6.1 The Council's Allowance scheme for Members, as detailed in Part 8 of the council's constitution, makes provision for the payment of certain expenses, in accordance with stipulated conditions.

6.2 The Executive Support Manager is responsible for administering the Members' Allowance Scheme and therefore oversees the receipt, processing and payment of all appropriate expense claims submitted by members.

6.3 A total of £1,439.41 was claimed in 2019-2020. The majority of these claims were for travel to and from Warwick and Coventry for LGA training/conferences. In addition to travel, there were also three claims for hotel accommodation for the LGA conference. Member Expenses for 2019 -2020 is attached at Appendix 4.

6.4 To date, there has been no expense claimed for 2020-2021 due to Members not attending face-face external training events.

## **7.0 Financial Implications – Expenses**

7.1 The costs of the member learning and development programme are met from a budget of £20,000. Internal sessions delivered by Council Officers help to keep costs down, there was no overspend this year.

## **8.0 Legal Implications**

8.1 None for the Member Development Programme.

8.2 The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 requires the council to keep a record of the payments made by it in accordance with its Members' Allowance Scheme. The record has to be made available for public inspection and copies can be supplied too on request and on payment of a reasonable fee.

8.3 After the end of each year, the total amount paid in that year to each member has to be published in the council's area.

## **9.0 Equality Implications**

9.1 This report contains no specific diversity implications.

## **10.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

10.1 This report has been shared with the Member Learning and Development Steering Group Members.

## **11.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)**

11.1 N/A

**Report sign off:**

**Shazia Hussain  
Assistant Chief Executive**