



**Audit and Standards Advisory
Committee
15 March 2022**

**Report from the Assistant Chief
Executive**

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

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	Three: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1 – Member Learning & Development Draft Future Programme • Appendix 2 – Charter Plus Assessment – Assessors' Comments • Appendix 3 – Member Expenses Claims
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Katie Smith, Head of Executive and Member Services Email: katie.smith@brent.gov.uk

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 (MLD) Programme since the last report to Committee in March 2021; and information regarding the Members' Expenses Scheme. Appendix 1 provides an overview of upcoming member learning and development sessions.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee notes the work being planned by the Member Learning and Development Steering Group in ensuring effective training and development for Brent's elected representatives (Appendix 1), as well as noting Member feedback on training and support received so far.

2.2 That the Committee agrees to the introduction of an 'acceptable use statement' obliging members to complete annual mandatory training on data protection (Para 5.4).

2.3 That the Committee notes that the Council received London Councils' Councillor Development Charter Plus accreditation in December 2021 and notes the positive

feedback received as part of the assessment process. (Appendix 2)

- 2.4 That the Committee notes the expenses claimed by Members in the course of their work in 2021-22 (Appendix 3).

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Members of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee last reviewed the Member Development Programme on 3 March 2021.
- 3.2 In addition to the annual review by members of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee, the member learning and development programme is monitored quarterly by the cross party Member Learning and Development Steering Group. The scope of the 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. The Council was complimented on this aspect as part of December 2021 recent Charter Plus assessment.

4.0 Member learning and development programme and the impact of Covid-19

- 4.1 Since the last report to the Committee on 31 March 2021, the Council has organised and delivered twenty-four Member Learning and Development sessions. Four of these sessions were compulsory sessions, and only one compulsory (Committee) session failed to have full attendance.
- 4.2 The programme has been deliberately designed with fewer sessions in early 2022 in order to accommodate the run up to the summer 2022 elections. To date, only two sessions have been delivered in early 2022, and no further non-mandatory sessions will be scheduled until June 2022.
- 4.3 Training has continued during the Covid-19 pandemic entirely on Zoom and Teams, but since lockdown eased, plans have been made to start holding sessions face-to-face from May 2022 onwards.
- 4.4 All 63 Members of the Council have access to Microsoft Teams and Zoom, and following the initial lockdown from March 2022, training was provided on conduct at remote meetings and how to chair a remote meeting. The vast majority of Members are comfortable using remote technology for Council business, there have been no security breaches and, in general, sessions are highly interactive as members make use of the hands up and chat function as well as contributing orally.
- 4.5 From May 2022, the Council plans to run a mixture of face-to-face training and online training sessions. For sessions that focus on skills development or where networking is important, face to face formats will be used.

5.0 Member attendance

- 5.1 Imparting knowledge via virtual training sessions has worked well throughout the pandemic and overall, attendance levels remain high with group sessions attracting between 21- 40 Members.

- 5.2 Aside from the mandatory sessions, the training sessions attracting the highest attendance were: *Return to Face to Face meetings*, *Health Inequalities and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy Consultation* and *Briefing on Health Community Champions*. These sessions attracted 40, 39 and 38 members respectively.
- 5.3 All but twelve Members have undertaken and completed all mandatory training for this municipal year. The only course not completed by all Councillors is the online General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) training. This was a new course in December 2020 and while take up compares favourably to other authorities, there is clearly a need to introduce further incentives to improve this next year.
- 5.4 The proposal is for councillors to sign an 'acceptable use statement' when they receive their new devices following the May 2022 election, whereby members agree to complete their mandatory training annually, or risk having their IT access blocked. The annual completion of data protection and General Data Protection Regulation training by both staff and members is vital to keeping residents' data and council systems safe from the increasing risks of cyber-attack.

6.0 External Training Events

- 6.1 Attendance at external training events was limited in the 2021-22 financial year as a result of the pandemic. Since March 2021, Members have attended of the following external training events: *Climate Change*, *Financial Management in Local Government*, *Suicide Prevention and mental Health*, and *Effective Cabinet Member Training*. Attendance at such sessions tend to be in response to individual requests and are approved where relevant to members' roles. In 2021-22 four all-member training sessions were delivered by external facilitators.

7.0 Feedback

- 7.1 Feedback has been crucial to shaping and developing the member development programme. In late 2021, a survey was sent to all Members to gather views on the usefulness of the weekly Member's Bulletin, and feedback was also gathered informally along with suggestions for future training. In summary, member feedback on the quality of the programme remains positive but there is always room for improvement, with suggestions made for the easy sharing of information on social media, requests for shorter bulletins to aid easier digestion of material, as well as a request for benchmarking with other boroughs.

8.0 Member Development Charter Award – November 2021

- 8.1 Brent Council's approach to member learning is regularly reviewed by an external assessor (the Local Government Association and London Councils) to check our approach is effective and informed by practice elsewhere. The Council was most recently assessed in November 2021 and the panel concluded that Brent Council continues to meet the standard of the Councillor Development Charter Plus, the highest award.
- 8.2 The panel included the assessor, a senior officer from another council and a leader from a London Borough. The feedback was very 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 by the high profile Member Development Steering Group.

- 8.3 The following areas were suggested for improvement:
- Plan the induction programme to include some face to face training to encourage networking; and include the partners in the training
 - Ensure that the needs of ward councillors are adequately reflected
 - Personal development plans – prioritise new councillors and those with new responsibilities
 - The mentoring programme needs to be corporately owned
 - Consider tailoring sessions for different groups of Cllrs (e.g. new vs more experienced)
 - Consider an individual accreditation for councillors

8.4 The full report is attached as Appendix 2.

9.0 Members' expenses

9.1 The Council's Allowance scheme for Members, as detailed in Part 6 of the council's constitution, makes provision for the payment of certain expenses, in accordance with stipulated conditions.

9.2 The Civic & Member Services 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.

9.3 A total of £1,717.08 was claimed between March 2021 – March 2022 for childcare cover. This was to support a Cabinet Member in their duties. Please see Appendix 3 for more details.

9.4 Given Covid-19, there were no travel or accommodation requests.

10.0 Financial Implications – Expenses

10.1 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, and there was no overspend this year.

11.0 Legal Implications

11.1 None for the Member Development Programme.

11.2 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.

11.3 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.

12.0 Equality Implications

12.1 This report contains no specific diversity implications.

13.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

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

14.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

14.1 N/A

Report sign off:

Shazia Hussain
Assistant Chief Executive