



**Audit and Standards Advisory
Committee**
21 March 2023

**Report from the Corporate Director,
Governance**

**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:	Four: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix A – MLD Draft Future Programme (22-23) • Appendix B – Feedback on the MLD Programme 2021 • Appendix C – PDP Results • Appendix D – Member Expenses Claims 2022
Background Papers:	N/A
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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 and Development (MLD) Programme since the last report to Committee in March 2022, 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 undertaken by the Member Learning and Development Steering Group in ensuring effective training and development for Brent's elected representatives. (Appendix A)

2.2 That the Committee notes Member feedback on Member Services, training, and their relationship with departments across Brent. (Appendix B)

2.3 That the Committee notes the positive feedback given by an outside organisation on its MLD. (Appendix C)

2.4 That the Committee notes the expenses claimed by Members in the course of their work in 2022 (Appendix D).

3.0 **Background**

3.1 Members of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee last reviewed the Member Development Programme in March 2022.

3.2 In addition to the annual review by members of the Standards and Audit Advisory Committee, the MLD 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.

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

4.1 The national lockdown and tier system restrictions began to lift in the UK from 8 March. Sessions had been moved online (where possible) and Members had become familiar and comfortable with using Teams and Zoom for sessions. Since lockdown ended in 2022, sessions have settled into a 'new normal' where online training continues to be used for most of the Member development and training sessions.

4.2 All 57 Members of the Council have access to Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Members and officers are very comfortable with both, there have been no security breaches and, in general, sessions are highly interactive as Members get used to using the 'hands up' button and 'chat function' as well as contributing orally.

4.3 We continue to run most of the training for Members online, with in house face-to-face (FTF) training the next most common form of training. Given feedback from Members during the work on their Personal Development Plans (PDP) (Appendix 3), the preferred method of learning and development is through virtual internal learning and information workshops delivered via a Teams/Zoom platform.

4.4 However, we also understand the value of FTF events as a useful networking and team-bonding tool, and for sessions such as 'effective communications', where FTF training is much more effective when carried out in person with other attendees present. In addition to training, this would also include team meetings, all-council sessions such as 'Forward Together', or social and informative events such as the staff Diwali party (to which members are also

invited). Councillors with chairing and special responsibilities also expressed an interest in building and attending networks (virtually and in person) with Councils and Councillors across London.

5.0 **Member attendance**

5.1 For non-mandatory sessions, group sessions in 2021 previously attracted 21-40 Members (out of 62 members) in 2021. Since May 2022, attendee numbers so far have varied between 13-39 Members (out of 57 Members). The three least popular sessions (in terms of attendance) have attracted a minimum of 4 people (Introduction to Public Speaking – disappointing considering this was identified as a top development priority), 13 people (for Council Budget and Finance), and 14 people (for Brent Culture, Libraries and Heritage) respectively. The three most popular sessions so far have been Housing and Selective Licensing Application (39 attendees), Major Emergency Awareness (32 attendees), and Cost of Living Crisis (31 attendees).

5.2 The mandatory sessions in May 2022 attracted 100% attendance, but only after multiple repeat sessions were offered (up until November 2022). In future, we will look at scheduling in multiple sessions of the same event ahead of time and asking Members to ensure they choose at least one. Hopefully this will allow all Members to attend all mandatory sessions prior to August, rather than ask officers to continually hold repeat sessions for those Members for whom mandatory training is still outstanding.

5.3 We have also delivered a handful of training sessions over lunchtime on Teams since May 2022. Attendance at these sessions has been relatively low, and verbal feedback suggests that these are unpopular with Members who work during the day. This is also borne out in the Report at Appendix 3 where the majority of respondents to the survey have indicated that they prefer development activities to be scheduled in the evening. Therefore, it is likely that, going forward, we will only schedule lunchtime sessions on an exceptional basis.

5.4 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 (the "Bulletin").

6.0 **External Training Events**

Attendance at external training events has not yet returned to pre-Covid levels, but sessions are now increasingly taking place in person across the country. Members have requested and attended sessions on topics including "Annual Licensing Conference", "Local Government Finance" and "Hate Crime conference". External trainers have also been successfully used to provide training for mandatory sessions, such as for the "Casework, Surgeries management, and Mod.gov". Post-event feedback for external trainers tends to be quite positive, which is integral when inviting them back again.

7.0 **Feedback**

7.1 Feedback has been crucial to shaping and developing the MLD programme. Appendix 2 details feedback received for mandatory sessions, standard Member learning and development, as well as feedback received on officers, induction sessions, the Bulletin, and reflections on the first six months of office for newly elected Members. Generally, feedback remains positive, and Member comments on how we can change certain things are under consideration with the relevant teams and departments.

8.0 Personal Development Plan (PDP) – November 2022

8.1 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 assessed in November 2021 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.

8.2 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.

8.3 All Members were offered the chance to undertake a PDP in late 2022. The approach undertaken was based on a structured one to one discussion and the completion of a Councillor PDP, the purpose being to support each Councillor in individually identifying the information and development they require to continue to fulfil their role as a Brent Councillor effectively. In total, 31 out of 57 Members (54%) Brent Councillors undertook this opportunity.

8.4 The following priorities were highlighted as a development need by Councillors:

- Charing skills and the ability to facilitate discussions (13 Councillors)
- Confidence in public speaking and making speeches (11 Councillors)
- Time Management (10 Councillors)
- Local Government Finance (12 Councillors)
- Cabinet and Leadership development (10 Councillors)
- Overview and scrutiny (8 Councillors)

8.5 It should, however, be noted that the report highlights as surprising the fact that Members did not identify clear development priorities from within the core six competencies (see 8.7) outlined in the LGA's Political Skills Framework¹ and instead the attributes for development were mostly identified from the three leadership areas. While this is likely to be because a high number of newly elected Members, who will have less leadership experience, responded to the survey, it is, as the report notes, a little surprising.

8.6 Nevertheless, we will ensure that development of these skills are included in the MLD programme going forward.

8.7 For reference, the LGAs six core competencies are:

- Local Leadership
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- Partnership working
- Communication skills
- Political understanding
- Scrutiny and challenge
- Regulating and monitoring

8.8 Scrutiny and Challenge was the only area within the six core competencies that Councillors completing the Questionnaire highlighted as a 'Area for Development' (40% plus of respondents highlighted themes within 'Scrutiny and Challenge' as a development priority).

8.9 The full report is attached as Appendix 3.

9.0 **Members' expenses**

9.1 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.

9.2 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.

9.3 Around £4,450 was claimed in 2022. An approximate figure has not been stated as final invoices and receipts are still to be sent to us for processing. Most of these claims were for mandatory and general training courses. Please see Appendix 4 for more details.

9.4 Travel and accommodation requests are now an additional factor in external sessions, following the end of lockdown, and this has already led to an increase of costs for sessions outside of London

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. Consequently, there was no overspend this year.

11.0 **Legal Implications**

11.1 None for the Member Learning and 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 also be supplied 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:

Debra Norman

Corporate Director, Governance