



**Audit and Standards Advisory  
Committee**  
28 March 2024

**Report from the Corporate Director  
of Governance**

**Lead Member – Deputy Leader &  
Cabinet Member for Finance,  
Resources & Reform  
(Councillor Mili Patel)**

**Annual Review of the Member Learning and Development  
(MLD) Programme and Members’ Expenses**

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	Three: Appendix 1: Upcoming MLD sessions Appendix 2: Feedback on the MLD Programme Appendix 3: Member Expenses Claims 2023
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Amira Nassr, Head of Chief Executive and Member Services 020 8937 5436 <a href="mailto:Amira.Nassr@brent.gov.uk">Amira.Nassr@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 and Development (MLD) Programme since the last report to Committee in March 2023 along with information regarding the Members’ Expenses Scheme and an update of the annual review of the financial and procedural rules governing the Mayor’s Charity Appeal.

## 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee notes the work being undertaken by the MLD Steering Group in continuing the effective training and development of Brent’s elected representatives. (as detailed within Appendix 1)

2.2 That the Committee notes Member feedback on MLD sessions, requests for

future training, and personal development plans (as detailed within Appendix 2)

- 2.3 That the Committee notes the expenses claimed by Members in the course of their work in 2023 (as detailed within Appendix 3).
- 2.4 That the Committee note the outcome of the annual review of the financial and procedural rules governing the Mayor's Charity Appeal.

### **3.0 Background**

#### Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1. The reviewing and maintenance of high standards of member conduct is supported by the MLD programme which in turn supports the delivery of the borough plan by promoting confidence in the operation and good governance of the council.

#### Detail

- 3.2 Members of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee last reviewed the Member Development Programme in March 2023.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 The Member Learning and Development Steering Group provides constructive input and evaluation of the programme. A strong political lead on Member development from all three groups is essential to ensure Member ownership of the programme.

### **4.0 Member learning and flexibility**

- 4.1 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 understand how to use the 'hands up' button and 'chat function' as well as contributing orally.
- 4.2 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. Member feedback has shown they prefer the convenience of attending online sessions and overall, attendance levels at online (non-mandatory) meetings tends to be much higher than face-to-face meetings.

### **5.0 Member attendance**

5.1 For non-mandatory sessions, group sessions in 2023 have attracted anything between 4-39 Members (out of 57 members) per session. The three least popular sessions (in terms of attendance) have been:

- Introduction to Public Speaking (4 attendees)
- Stress at work and its impact on mental health for Members (5)
- Overview of the Procurement Strategy with a focus on social value (6)

The three most popular sessions this year have been:

- Housing and Selective Licensing Application (39)
- New online reporting for street issues (35)
- Member briefing session - Housing Needs (34)

5.2 The Executive Support Manager maintains a log of incidents reported by Members. In terms of trends, there was one incident reported in 2020, five in 2022 and three in 2023. An online training session hosted by the LGA in partnership with Miranda Smythe from the Baikie-Wood Consultancy Ltd, was held on 29 January 2023 focused on Personal Safety. This was part of the LGA's Civility in Public Life Programme. The session was attended by 17 Members. There was mixed feedback from the session although only three Members provided this. We will continue to explore this topic with Members.

5.3 'Data Protection' was the only mandatory session scheduled in 2023. There is only one Member outstanding who was on maternity leave when this was originally scheduled. Individual arrangements are now being made with this Member.

5.4 We have also delivered a handful of training sessions over lunchtime on Teams in 2023. Attendance at these sessions lies between 9-18 attendees, but verbal feedback suggests that these are unpopular with Members who work during the day. With this in mind, lunchtime sessions tended only to be scheduled in exceptional cases in 2023, but we are finding a congested calendar in 2024 means more lunchtime sessions are having to be scheduled given a lack of evening availability.

5.5 Hybrid sessions – which run on Teams and in person concurrently – have been trialled a handful of times at the request of the MLD Steering Group, most recently in February 2024. Feedback from these sessions has been mixed. Those attending sessions face-to-face find the session run smoothly enough, those who attend online feel neglected or sidelined with those in the room being perceived as receiving greater attention, and officers feel additionally stressed, especially if IT issues arise. In the February hybrid session, three of the online attendees rated their hybrid experience as "poor" or "very poor". This feedback will be fed back to the LMD Steering Group, for them to decide on the future of hybrid meetings.

5.6 Member attendance at internal learning and development sessions has varied for each session during the current municipal year. Reminders are issued regularly via Outlook calendar invitations and reminders, text and Whatsapp messages and email, in the fortnightly Members' Information Bulletin, as well as reminders by the respective political/admin assistants.

## **6.0 External Training Events**

6.1 Members have requested and attended sessions on topics including The Hate Crime conference, The Social Housing Services Conference, Leadership Masterclass as well as LGA conferences focused on LGBTQ, Young Councillor's and BAME Councillors. External trainers have also been used to provide training on Public Speaking and Dealing with Stress at Work. External trainers tend to attract a very small audience – usually at the trainer's request - and feedback received for their sessions tends to be excellent.

## **7.0 Feedback**

7.1 Feedback has been crucial to shaping and developing the MLD programme. Appendix 2 details feedback received for Member learning and development.

7.2 Generally, feedback remains positive, and Member comments on how we can change certain things continue to be fed back to the relevant teams and departments.

## **8.0 Personal Development Plan (PDP) – 2022**

8.1 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.

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

- Chairing 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)

8.3 Charter Plus are also due to carry out PDP reviews from June 2024 (two years after they were first carried out). These are 1-2-1 sessions between Charter Plus and the Member who originally undertook their PDP in late 2022. Members who wish to undertake their PDPs for the first time will also be encouraged to do this.

8.4 Looking further ahead, Brent Council's re-assessment is due to take place between December 2024 and March 2025. This is an intense piece of work where the Member Services team are expected to provide a wealth of evidence and documents showing how we continue to meet Charter Plus requirements and how we continue to support our members. Once evidence is submitted, Charter Plus will grade this and submit their results as to whether Brent Council meets the standards it has signed up to achieve.

## **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 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 £18,267 was claimed in 2023 for mandatory and general training courses, as well as for Caring duties. Please see Appendix 3 for more details.

## **10. Financial And Procedural Rules Governing The Mayor's Charity Appeal**

- 10.1 It was agreed by the committee last year that this annual report should in future also include the annual update on the financial and procedural rules governing the Mayor's Charity Appeal.
- 10.2 Each Mayor in their capacity as First Citizen chooses no more than three charities which they intend to support through donations/fund raising events during the Mayoral year.
- 10.3 The Financial and Procedural Rules (the Rules) governing the Mayor's Charity Appeal were updated in November 2021. To ensure the Rules remain transparent and accurate, a periodic review is undertaken by officers. If, following this review, it is proposed to make any substantive modifications, they are notified to this committee and require the formal approval of the Audit and Standards Committee. No such changes are proposed following this year's review.

## **11. Financial Considerations – Expenses**

- 11.1 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 in 2023.
- 11.2 The funds collected by the Mayor's Office on behalf of the charities are governed by trustee and charity law; they must be registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales at the date they are selected.

## **12. Legal Considerations**

- 12.1 None for the Member Learning and Development Programme.
- 12.2 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.
- 12.3 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.

12.4 The civic role of the Mayor is governed by s3 the Local Government Act 1972. However, when the Mayor nominates and then supports one or more charities by raising proceeds which are then donated to a charity, or charities, of their choice, the Council is exercising its wellbeing powers pursuant to s2 Local Government Act 2000.

### **13. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Considerations**

13.1 This report contains no specific diversity implications.

### **14. Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

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

### **15. Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

15.1 N/A

### **16. Additional Considerations**

16.1 There are no additional considerations in relation to the following areas arising from the report

- a) Climate Change and Environmental considerations
- b) Communication considerations

**Report sign off:**

**Debra Norman**  
Corporate Director, Governance