

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Audit and Standards Advisory Committee</b> 24 March 2026</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Report from the Corporate Director Finance &amp; Resources</b></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lead Member – Deputy Leader &amp; Cabinet Member for Finance &amp; Resources</b> <b>(Councillor Mili Patel)</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Annual Review of the Member Learning and Development (MLD) Programme and Members’ Expenses</b></p>	

<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>	Four: Appendix 1: Upcoming MLD sessions Appendix 2: Feedback on the MLD Programme Appendix 3: Member Training and Expenses 24/25 Appendix 4: Financial Rules governing the Mayor
<b>Background Papers:</b>	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 2025 along with information regarding the Members’ Expenses Scheme and 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 and Charter Plus (as detailed within Appendix 2).
- 2.3 That the Committee notes the expenses claimed by Members in the course of their work in 2025/26 (as detailed within Appendix 3).
- 2.4 The financial and procedural rules governing the Mayor's Charity Appeal has also been attached (Appendix 4). There have been no changes made in 2025/26.

### **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 2025.
- 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.
- 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 and tend to have at least an iPhone and iPad. About half of all Members have a laptop as well or instead of an iPad, depending on their personal preference. Members and officers are very comfortable with both, there have been no security breaches over the last 12 months 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 that they prefer the convenience of attending online sessions and overall, attendance levels at online (non-mandatory) meetings tends to be much higher than for face-to-face meetings.

## **5.0 Member attendance**

5.1 For non-mandatory sessions, group sessions in 2025/26 have attracted anything between 12-33 Members (out of 57 members) per session. The two least popular sessions (in terms of attendance) have been:

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller strategy (12 attendees)
- Gambling and gaming harm (14)

The two most popular sessions this year have been:

- Social Progress Index (33)
- Housing Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Pressures (25)

5.2 It should be noted that the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller strategy took place at lunchtime, which may attribute to the low attendance figures. More generally, lunchtime sessions tend only to be scheduled in exceptional cases, but a congested calendar might mean lunchtime sessions would have to be scheduled given a lack of evening availability.

5.3 Another session - Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults susceptible to financial fraud and scams – was scheduled for 3 March 2026, but was cancelled due to low take-up.

5.4 'Data Protection' was the only mandatory session scheduled in 2025. This had 100% attendance, although it did run five times to accommodate everyone's availability.

5.5 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/administrative assistants.

5.6 MLD tries to work around Member availability as much as possible. Given sunset in Ramadhan fell between 5.30pm - 6pm in 2026, Chairs of committees and sessions Leads were made aware of when the fast end coincided with their evening MLD and committee meetings and advised to work around this for the benefit of attendees who may have been fasting. As in previous years, a few tweaks were made (some sessions had a small break, and others started slightly later) to accommodate the fast break. Similarly, MLD tends to avoid holding MLD sessions over half term, Christmas and August to allow parents to balance their childcare commitments with their councillor responsibilities.

## **6.0 External Training Events**

6.1 External trainers have been used minimally these past few years due to a reduced need from Members or officers as well as the reduced budget. There is normally a wider use of external trainers following local elections. Member Services will be using external trainers to train Members on certain mandatory training and committee sessions in May/June 2026.

## **7.0 Feedback**

7.1 Feedback continues to shape and develop the MLD programme. Appendix 2 details feedback received for Member Learning and development.

7.2 Feedback has been mixed, and ranges from the negative (lack of interaction, a lack of relevant officers attending a session, to session timings) to the positive (effective, engaging, excellent). Feedback is shared with each trainer after each event.

## **8.0 Personal Development Plan (PDP) – 2024**

8.1 All Members were offered the chance to undertake a PDP in 2022 and a refresh in 2024. 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.

8.2 As part of our contract with Charter Plus, we are due to revisit the PDPs every two years. The next time this will take place is in autumn 2026.

8.3 As with previous elections where turnover has been anything up to a third of all Members, we are expecting between 20-30 newly elected Councillors to start, and we will be focusing on them to undertake PDPs for the first time.

## **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 £11,141.34 was spent in 2025/26 for mandatory and general training courses. Childcare cover for three Members also came to £8,666.47. 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 1-2 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 last year. 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.
- 10.4 No changes have been made to this paper, but this has been included for reference.

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

- 11.1 The costs of the Member Learning and Development Programme are met from a budget of £14,000. Internal sessions delivered by Council Officers help to keep costs down.
- 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

**Report sign off:**

Minesh Patel  
Corporate Director, Finance & Resources