

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Standards Committee</b>  <b>22 March 2011</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Report from the Mayor's Office  and Member Development  Manager</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Wards Affected:  NONE</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Annual Review of the Member Development  Programme May 2010 – April 2011</b></p>	

**1.0 Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the Member Development Programme. The report outlines the activities undertaken by members since May 2010, including the induction programme following the elections in May 2010, and an analysis of the feedback received from members. The report also identifies constraints on the programme and consideration is given to future development of the programme and to additional training opportunities for members such as the e-learning package 'Modern Councillor'.

**2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to note this report.

**3.0 Detail**

**3.1 Activities and achievements since May 2010**

**Member Development Charter:**

Brent has been awarded the London Council's charter for member development excellence. The charter is awarded to councils in recognition of their work to provide councillors with the support, skills and training they need to develop and manage their local authorities budgets and services. It is backed by the Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID). The charter lasts for three years, after which time the council will need to be reassessed.

The award is testament to the commitment that members and officers have shown to supporting and developing members. "Brent Council has worked very hard to introduce ways of providing support to its members and helping them to develop their skills and knowledge. This not only benefits the councillors themselves, but also ensures that their residents receive the best possible leadership and services from their local council." (*Chair of London Councils, Mayor Pipe*).

In relation to standards, the assessors found that "Brent's good practice on standards is widely recognised and there is now an annual networking event with councils in the West London Alliance and more recently also included Barnet, Islington and Kensington & Chelsea." The assessors also considered the fact that the Standards Committee reviews the member development programme every year to be good practice. The assessors were also very impressed with the Monitoring Officer Advice Notes for members.

### **Induction programme:**

A comprehensive induction programme was delivered following the local elections in May 2010 which was designed to cater for both new and existing members. Events were developed for the induction programme as a result of feedback collected following the last induction in 2006, members' feedback over the 2006-2010 term of office, and consultation with the member development steering group, the political group offices and colleagues in the London-wide member development network.

Events held included:

- Welcome reception for all councillors on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010 - councillors were given the opportunity to sign the declaration of acceptance of office and have their official photographs taken. They also received a briefing from the Borough Solicitor on the Members' Code of Conduct.
- Full induction day on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2010 - included presentations from members of the Corporate Management Team and other senior officers. A members' handbook was provided to all councillors at this event. This comprised of a short booklet explaining all the key information needed by councillors. The day also included an outside speaker who delivered an exploration of some of the main challenges facing local councillors over the next four years.
- Service specific induction sessions (*May-July*):
  - 19<sup>th</sup> May 2010 - Planning and Licensing briefings

- 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010- Community and Diversity issues; community engagement & leadership, neighbourhood working and ACF briefings
- 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010 - The council's finances, budget and future challenges; and environment, highways, transportation and culture issues
- 14<sup>th</sup> June 2010- Corporate Strategy and Overview & Scrutiny briefing
- 17<sup>th</sup> June 2010 - Housing, health and adult social care issues; and children and young people's issues

Feedback was sought from members following every induction event. The majority of feedback received during the induction period was very positive, for example enthusiastic appreciation was shown of the session on community engagement held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and of the session dealing with the council's finances on 10<sup>th</sup> June. Feedback from other sessions also included constructive comments and suggestions on how events might be improved, with one such suggestion being to allow more time and/or giving certain topics their own session. Bearing in mind the significant number of members new to the role of councillor, it is not surprising that many of the sessions were felt to contain a great deal of material. However, when considering the council's full calendar of meetings and all the external demands on new members' time, as well as other feedback comments from members who noted how full and busy the induction programme's schedule was, it is difficult to see how building in extra demands on members' time at such a busy time could be justified. Therefore in the future it is not proposed that the induction programme be lengthened.

Some members suggested allowing more time for questions. However, feedback from other members included the proposal that an experienced member chair the question and answer slots held during each event due to the tendency of these slots to overrun if left without a chair. This was introduced half way through the induction programme as a direct result of member feedback and the response from members was extremely positive. Therefore it is not proposed to lengthen future timeslots for questions and answers. It is worth noting that officers always responded to any member who still had questions at the close of an event by inviting the member to contact them directly to have their questions answered outside of the induction event.

There was also a welcome event for new councillors, organised by the GLA, held at City Hall on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010. No feedback has been received from any member who may have attended this event therefore it is not possible to evaluate the value of the information provided.

As anticipated, existing time constraints prevented some members from attending every session. With the exception of the full induction day held on 16<sup>th</sup> May, which took place on a Sunday, the sessions were all scheduled to take place during the evening, to allow those

members with full time employment commitments to attend. Events were also arranged during evenings which did not clash with council committee meetings. This helped ensure maximum possible participation from members. Each session took place in the evening, lasted between two and three hours and included time for members to ask questions.

### **September to December 2010:**

Following the induction programme a number of member development events were held between September and December 2010. These have been delivered by a mixture of external trainers, internal officers and partners:

- 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> September – Microsoft Office including Outlook use – basic IT skills for members
- 22<sup>nd</sup> September – Getting the most out of meeting – chairing skills for councillors
- 7<sup>th</sup> October – Questioning skills for members
- 1<sup>st</sup> November – Planning Committee Training
- 9<sup>th</sup> November – Standards Training
- 18<sup>th</sup> November – Treasury Management Training
- 29<sup>th</sup> November – Partnership Briefing –Safer Neighbourhood Teams /Community Safety / Neighbourhood Working Event

### **Personal Development Plans:**

Following an invitation to all councillors, 34 councillors took up the opportunity to have a personal development plan (PDP) interview in September 2010. All PDP interviews were conducted by an external consultant. Interviews lasted on average 45 minutes to an hour. Individual personal development plans were then produced and agreed by each member who took part in the process. The PDP process is kept confidential to allow members the opportunity to discuss any issues in confidence.

The following areas were identified as common areas of development.

- Public Speaking / Communication Skills – development in this area was a recurrent theme for members. The consultant recommended that some form of training in this area would be very beneficial for members.
- Dealing with large amounts of paperwork and time management – a number of members raised this as something that they were having problems with. The consultant felt that training in time management and effective reading would be of use to members. It was also felt that there may be a need for the council to review the way

information is presented to members to ensure that information is presented to members in the most succinct way possible.

- Scrutiny of policy and performance – some members raised this as an area where they would like to have some training in so that when a problem arises in their ward, they would know how to look at the way the council tackles the issue on a wider scale. This will also be beneficial for members who are on the various scrutiny committees.
- IT training. This was an area where some councillors felt they would like to develop their skills. Members IT abilities varied greatly. There were a few members who it was recommended could do with one on one support with some of the problems they were experiencing.
- Chairing skills – some members raised this as an area for development. A number mentioned that they had received training for chairing skills back in September which they had found very useful.
- Shadowing officers from the council and other partner organisations to gain a greater understanding of work in that particular area for example housing and planning.

These development needs were taken into account for those events which took place from January to April 2011 and will continue to be met through the rolling programme.

#### **January to April 2011:**

A number of events have been held since January 2011. These have been based around the results of the personal development interviews and areas identified by councillors and senior managers. The sessions have been delivered by a mixture of external trainers, internal officers and partners:

- 13<sup>th</sup> January 2011 - Practical Chairing Tips
- 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 - Alcohol and Licensing Committee Training
- 26<sup>th</sup> January 2011 - Housing Briefing
- 27<sup>th</sup> January 2011 – Standards Network Event (included a training element)
- 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011 – Speed Reading and Retention Training
- 24<sup>th</sup> February 2011 – Disability Equality Training
- 15<sup>th</sup> March 2011 – Public Speaking Skills Training

Further scheduled sessions:

- 28<sup>th</sup> March 2011 Ward Working - Maximising Potential
- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 Safeguarding Children and Corporate Parenting
- 14<sup>th</sup> April 2011 – Health and Safety Training

### **Attendance at external events:**

16 members have attended an external event over the last year. The number of external events which were attended was 13. (some members attended more than one external event and some members attended the same external event).

Due to financial constraints and the cost of extending external events, a decision was made in July 2010 to limit the amount of fee based external events which members attend. Instead members have been encouraged to attend free external events or events which are at a minimal cost.

Members of the Standards Committee, following last year's review on the member development programme, noted with concern that there had been a significant number of occasions where members had failed to attend courses on which they had been booked, sometimes cancelling at short notice without any reasons being given resulting in a loss of money. This has not been such an issue this year. There have been three occasions where councillors have been unable to attend an event that they were booked on. However, one of these events was free and in the other two cases enough notice was given to the organisers so that the council was not charged. Following a request by the member development steering group, the guidance for member attendance at external events has been updated to stress the need for members to ensure that they attend events that they are committed to.

### **Feedback from members regarding the member development programme (covering those events since the induction):**

Feedback is sought from members following every training event attended, both internal and external. Feedback and evaluation forms have been revised to make the evaluation form more concise. The majority of feedback received after attendance at internal events during the past year has been very positive, for example enthusiastic appreciation has been shown of the development of interactive training sessions. Feedback has also included constructive proposals for future events. Significantly fewer members submitted feedback following their attendance at external events, although when such feedback is received, this too has been largely positive.

### **Political support:**

The member development steering group (MDSG) has met on a quarterly basis during the timeframe covered in this report and has provided constructive input and evaluation consistently during this time. A strong political lead on member development from all groups is essential to ensure member ownership of the programme and to improve future attendance and participation in the programme, and in

this respect input from the steering will continue to be extremely valuable.

The member development steering group has now combined with the ward working reference group as it was felt that that these two groups could be a more efficient tool when working as a single entity given the overlapping nature of the groups' agendas and membership.

### **3.2 Constraints**

#### **Time constraints of councillors:**

A number of dates were identified in the Council's official calendar of meetings for member development, but time constraints remain a problem for members. In terms of time available for member development sessions, there was approximately one or two dates per month dedicated to these events during the past year, with the exception of the August recess and the couple of months leading up to the elections. There have been a couple of months where there has been room in the council calendar to fit in two or more sessions a month. Each session, which takes place in the evening, lasts between two and three hours and includes time for members to ask questions. It is possible to schedule development sessions during the day but a greater overall reliance on day time sessions is not however recommended as it would have the effect of placing members in full time employment at a disadvantage, as it is likely that they would be unable to attend.

### **3.3 Next steps**

#### **Structured programme**

The programme will continue to provide carefully structured development opportunities on a rolling programme basis, and will be based on needs identified in the Personal Development interviews and other organisational and legislative issues that arise. Future events will include the opportunity for members to be supported in their roles as community leaders, as well as additional work to develop the roles of opposition, non-Executive, and members involved in Overview and Scrutiny.

#### **E-Learning**

The council is currently in the process of purchasing Learning Pools modern councillor e-learning package. The courses will be able to tie in with the Political Skills Framework tool which was purchased by the council in conjunction with Harrow Council.

The e-learning package will benefit Councillors by enabling:

- Any time, any place, any pace learning
- Learning in privacy
- Bite sized learning that can be revisited
- Guidance on the latest initiatives

The council will benefit from:

- Increased access to “hard to reach” councillors
- Ability to provide blended learning programmes
- Tracked and evidenced learning
- Cost efficiencies

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The costs of the member development programme are met from a budget of £15,072. A significant proportion of the events in the programme over the last year have been delivered internally by council officers, which has helped to keep the costs down.

The large number of new members following the local elections is likely to result in a continued increase in demand for training during the next financial year and consequently careful resource management will be necessary in order to ensure efficient use of funding.

A meeting has been arranged between Brent and Harrow Council to discuss the possibility of sharing training events and training providers. The London Member Development Network is also looking into the possibility of looking at the joint commissioning of training providers.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 None.

#### **6.0 Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 Officers believe that there are no specific diversity implications in this report.

**For further information please contact:**

Elly Cook  
Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager  
Tel: 020 8973 1158  
[elly.cook@brent.gov.uk](mailto:elly.cook@brent.gov.uk)