


Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

7 February 2020

Subject:	Update on the Member Development Programme
Director:	Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer – Surjit Tour
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer:	Phil Challoner phil_challoner@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee:

1. Notes the continued progress of the Member Development Programme to date, including plans to factor in feedback from phase one plus outputs from Personal Development Plan (PDP) meetings, as part of phase two of the programme which will commence from next Municipal Year 2020.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 For the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee to note the progress of the Member Development Programme to date, including plans to review future content and scope to ensure it remains a programme designed by Members that is fit for purpose to meet their ongoing needs.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION

- 2.1 Elected Members with the requisite skills, knowledge and understanding of subject matters impacting upon their role will result in positive implications for each Vision 2030 ambition.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Elected Member Development Programme ('MDP') has been continually designed and led by Members.
- 3.2 Last year, the Local Government Association Peer Review team participated in a follow up visit to Sandwell and were briefed on the progress relating to the Member Development Programme. Feedback was outstanding describing the progress relating to the MDP as 'phenomenal' adding the programme was an 'exemplar' relating to the approach taken and delivery to date.
- 3.3 They were also updated on development of bulletins which have been continually circulated to Elected Members and contains key information on forthcoming training, as well as updates related to the upcoming 'My Councillor' portal which is currently in its design stage ahead of an anticipated pilot and Spring time launch this year.
- 3.4 Since phase one of the MDP commenced in October 2018, a total of 76 sessions have been delivered. These are related to the following interventions:
- Universal Credit Briefing Sessions
 - A Focus Group on Members' ICT needs
 - "The Big Conversation" - a partnership marketplace event
 - Corporate Parenting
 - Safeguarding and Vulnerabilities Awareness Raising
 - Understanding Council Finance
 - Understanding Overview and Scrutiny Training
 - Planning related Training
 - Licensing related Training (Taxi, Alcohol and Gambling)
 - Members' Code of Conduct
 - Data Protection
 - Procurement Training
 - Child Trafficking, Exploitation, Modern Slavery Training
 - Overview and Scrutiny Review – Member engagement sessions
 - Understanding Dementia

- Community Engagement (Delivered jointly in-house with West Midlands Employers)
- Audit and Risk
- The previously postponed How to get the most from Social Media (Delivered via the Local Government Association)
- Mop-up sessions for Data Protection
- Personal Safety for Elected Members Training
- Queen's Honours and Awards
- Being an effective Councillor: ways of strengthening and sustaining personal resilience (Delivered by the Local Government Information Unit)
- Prevention Matters -a one-day facilitated workshop for elected members to support their role as champions of health improvement and prevention in their local community
- Equalities and Religious Awareness Training

3.5 Turnout at these sessions have remained encouragingly high for most Elected Members with, for example, over 60% attending Corporate Parenting training. Based on the Phase One interventions delivered to date, the average attendance rate is currently at 50% which compares favourably with levels prior to phase one of the MDP that averaged only 22%. Most recently, attendance levels have dropped to an average of 44%. This follows a period of change which also included a Parliamentary General Election.

3.6 Member feedback following sessions held to date has, however, remained very positive and comments include:

"Member Participation was very good. A very keen interest was shown by all members in the Chamber". "Very Good training and well delivered."
 "Trainer spoke well and made the topic engaging and easy to understand." "Enjoyed Session and discussions." "Brilliant. Eyeopener."
 "Appreciate the session about our wellbeing as councillors-Sometimes we forget whilst serving other people to remind ourselves about our own health. Future similar sessions will be much appreciated." "Very Good."
 "Very enjoyable and informative." "Brilliant."

Members have also given constructive comments as to how some sessions can improve on certain aspects such as:

"prior knowledge of subject matter would have been useful",
 "the technology could not be viewed by some delegates which was frustrating.", "Bitesize sessions/topics 2 hours not long enough."

“Due to not having/using social media I struggled with varied social media terminology. Maybe a session on how to set up using social media. Maybe I could get help in social media 1-1.”

In those instances, an immediate review is undertaken between Civic and Member Services and the facilitator to ensure these issues are rectified or mitigated at future sessions.

3.7 Further sessions for phase one are scheduled to take place imminently and include:

- Equalities and Religious Awareness Training on 13 February
- Mop-up sessions for Members’ Code of Conduct on 10, 17 and 24 February

Other training sessions are currently in the process of being sourced and will be communicated via MDP bulletins in due course.

3.8 The new MDP continues to be more than just training, advice and guidance. As part of the initial programme design Members identified, via workshops held, 26 key requirements a new Councillor Portal needed to meet. These included:

- A directory of key service areas/contacts to avoid unnecessary searching
- The facility for councillors to access what is key to them personally
- An enquiries section with the ability to escalate
- Latest news and updates
- Learning menus/a training directory
- Links to Council websites and much more

Following on from previous reports to this committee, the Digital Solution Working Group have continued to explore how the 26 key requirements can be met.

A report was presented to a Digital Solution Board meeting where it was agreed the Firmstep’s Councillor Portal met all the requirements enabling the Council to digitise their processes for Councillors through a dedicated self-service portal. This portal will allow Councillors to transact online for a broad range of member and constituent services. The portal can be branded differently to the Council’s main website and be used to provide Councillor specific information as well as a one stop shop for all member services.

This portal will look to include links to council meetings, agendas and minutes, Councillor notifications/communications and a range of specific processes which allows Councillors to log, track and escalate requests reported on behalf of constituents. This is an exciting, key element of the MDP and addresses all aspects associated with creating a sustainable digital solution for all 72 Elected Members.

Work continues at pace and includes officers working alongside Elected Members in ensuring the final solution is fit for purpose to meet all 26 requirements. Alongside the design and launch of the new portal, Elected Member training and upskilling requirements has been factored in to all PDP meetings and will be addressed via the MDP to ensure the portal is consistently, as well as confidently, utilised by all 72 Councillors with support at hand as required.

- 3.9 The Leader has agreed a new peer process for conducting PDP meetings which commenced during January this year. The Leader will carry out PDP's for Cabinet Members who will then carry out PDP's for Town Leads. Town Leads will then carry out PDP's for all other Elected Members. It is anticipated this process will be completed by 31 March 2020 to help inform phase two of the MDP that will commence from the next Municipal Year and will incorporate induction requirements for newly Elected Members. Training on how to carry out effective PDP's was delivered to the Leader, Cabinet and Town Leads by the Civic and Member Services Manager on 30 October 2019.
- 3.10 A further example of support via the new MDP relates to Member Wellbeing, Resilience and Personal Safety. The role of an Elected Member is fast changing, with numerous relentless demands placed upon an individual's time and resources. Latest links to LGA workbooks on stress management and personal resilience will continue to be circulated to all 72 Members via MDP bulletins. Personal resilience training for Elected Members was sourced via the LGiU (Local Government Information Unit) and took place early December 2019. The feedback was excellent from those who were able to attend. Whilst this was scheduled several weeks in advance, attendance was lower than anticipated due to the Parliamentary General Election, so consideration will be given to invite the external facilitator to return, if the demand is there from Elected Members.

3.11 In addition, and in response to feedback, four training sessions relating to Personal Safety and Lone Working for Elected Members were delivered on 19 November 2019, 7 and 10 January respectively. The aim of this essential learning course was *'To raise awareness of personal safety issues in relation to aggression and violence. Explore how to anticipate, avoid and deal with incidents during the course of your duties'*.

Key outcomes of the course included:

- To state what makes an aggressive incident
- To describe the new incident reporting procedure
- To recognise your body's response to fear/aggression
- To describe how to calm and de-escalate conflict situations
- To recognise the role your behaviour has in the violent behaviour cycle

It should be noted Specialist Officers from WM Police positively endorsed the content and approach which included a filmed introduction by Chief Superintendent Richard Youds.

This course was delivered in-house by officers from the Council's Health and Safety Unit supported by officers from the Civic and Member Services team.

3.12 A full review of phase one, to consolidate key strengths and establish areas for improvement, is currently taking place and will be reported back to the next Committee ahead of phase two. It is noted individual PDP discussions may contain matters that require confidentiality. Where agreed, outputs from individual PDP meetings, which commenced in January 2020, will continue to influence future MDP content and this will be consolidated at future workshops to be held as part the overall review process.

4 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

4.1 Elected Members have been consulted at key stages of the process, feeding into the design and delivery of the Member Development Programme via workshops and PDP's. Elected Members are also represented on both the Digital Solution Working Group and Board.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 Alternative options have not been considered as the MDP has been developed with Members and the purpose of the MDP is to deliver development, learning and support requirements designed and/or requested by Members themselves.

6 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The MDP will involve a range of providers and support being utilised to ensure effective development and learning. The costs of such support will be met from existing approved budgets.

7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 An effective Member Development Programme will help ensure the council make informed decisions and empower Members in undertaking their various roles.
- 7.2 Members in relation to regulatory matters/functions are required to undertake specific kinds of training such as planning, licensing, standards and safeguarding.
- 7.3 Supporting Members in their development, training and support needs strengthens the council's governance arrangements.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The Members Development Programme will address any Equality Act implications and issues arising.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 Personal Development Plans remain confidential and any discussion concerning the same would be held in confidence.

10 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

10.1 There are no such implications arising.

11 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

11.1 The Member Development Programme is a two-phase initiative designed to ensure Elected Members have the requisite skills, support and knowledge necessary to undertake their various roles. Following phase two, a fundamental review will be held to consider how the MDP is sustained from 2021.

12 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

12.1 There are no such implications arising.

13 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

13.1 There are no such implications arising.

14 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 Designed to inform Members of MDP progress, this report will act as an update in relation to the progress of the programme.

15 BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 None.

16 APPENDICES:

16.1 ONE Latest MDP Bulletin