


Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

13 August 2020

Subject:	Update on phase two of the Member Development Programme including implementation of the My Councillor Member Portal
Director:	Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer – Surjit Tour
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
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DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee:

1. Notes the continued progress relating to phase two of the Member Development Programme which includes the latest on the design, pilot and future launch of the 'My Councillor' Member Portal.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 For the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee to note progress of phase two of the Member Development Programme and how Members have been supported by on-line learning and development interventions during the covid outbreak. In addition, the report outlines pilot and roll-out arrangements for the 'My Councillor' portal. Finally, to bring the Committee up to speed with how future content and scope of the member development programme will continue to be shaped by Members, ensuring it 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

Member Development Programme Phase 1

- 3.1 The Elected Member Development Programme ('MDP') has been continually designed and led by Members.
- 3.2 Last year, the Local Government Association ('LGA') Peer Review team participated in a follow up visit to Sandwell and were briefed on the progress relating to the MDP. Feedback was outstanding describing progress as 'phenomenal' adding the programme was an 'exemplar' relating to the approach taken and delivery to date. This approach and momentum has continued, and a submission has been entered for an upcoming national HR Excellence Awards in the category 'Best Learning and Development Strategy'. The LGA have maintained close contact with the programme throughout phase one and have assisted with providing external courses, including Peer Councillors, at no charge.
- 3.3 Following the update to committee on 7 February 2020, phase one of the MDP concluded prematurely due to the COVID-19 pandemic . However, all scheduled essential and requested learning was delivered successfully. Additional learning interventions requested, were also delivered early this year which coincided with Elected Member Personal Development Plan ('PDP') meetings that reviewed phase one and considered future interventions and priorities for phase two.
- 3.4 In total 73% of 'Peer' Elected Member PDP meetings took place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This confidential process has helped to inform phase two of the programme and includes positive feedback and constructive comments to improve the learner experience. From analysis of PDP's undertaken, phase one of the MDP was deemed successful and examples of the most enjoyed interventions, where more detailed knowledge has been requested, include:
- Personal Safety
 - Understanding Social Media
 - Personal Resilience
 - Understanding Dementia
 - Corporate Parenting

For phase one interventions, the average attendance rate was approximately 50% which compares favourably with levels prior to phase one of the MDP that averaged only 22%. Interventions such as Corporate Parenting recorded over 60% attendance levels.

- 3.5 As reported in February, there has been some very positive feedback on the facilitated sessions and suggested future development proposals have been requested on the back of initial learning. Constructive comments received focused primarily around reducing the volume of training offered to prevent overload and ensuring key elements within existing training were afforded greater exposure.

Member Development Programme Phase 2

- 3.6 Priority learning and development identified from PDP's included:

- ICT upskilling at a basic and intermediate level to include Word and Excel
- Chairing Meetings /Committees
- Public speaking
- Using Social Media effectively
- Additional Well-being training

The essential learning provided during Phase One was welcomed by all Councillors. Committee, Council Protocols and Procedures and Artemis on-line learning have been suggested to be included as essential training in Phase Two.

PDP feedback has identified essential core learning for all newly Elected Members, however, most current members would welcome refresher workshops on the content, suggested at 3 year intervals. This would be evolve in line with member identified need alongside any substantial changes to regulations or guidelines.

Covid-19 related learning and development

- 3.7 Since phase one of the MDP concluded prematurely in February this year, Civic and Member Services have worked closely with the Artemis Team and external providers such as LGA, LGiU and WM Employers to offer members a range of on-line learning interventions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. These have included:

- Thriving During Isolation
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)
- Social Media
- Chairing Skills

- Additional Artemis programmes e.g. Child Sexual Exploitation, Poverty
- LGA on-line forum for councillors
- Managing and Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing (scheduled for September 2020)

Artemis reporting has indicated an encouraging rise in take up for the ACE's and DVA courses since the pandemic began.

- 3.8 Information, advice and guidance relating to learning and development opportunities have continuously been circulated via Member Bulletins including a recent lockdown special bulletin in July. Future bulletins will include reminders to access on-line learning as much as possible during this uncertain time when it is unlikely traditional leaning will be a viable option for some time.

Planned Member Development Activity

- 3.9 Whilst priority will be given to the pilot and launch of the 'My Councillor' portal, Civic and Member Services will be working with internal providers to explore ways in which existing courses can be delivered via platforms such as MS Teams.
- 3.10 In addition, research and contact will continue to be made with external providers to ensure suitable learning opportunities are made available to members where appropriate.
- 3.10 Work is also underway with colleagues across the Democracy function to develop new packages that will assist members in a variety of roles to assist from a role identification, procedural, signposting and networking perspective. Ahead of the next Municipal election, the newly elected member induction arrangements will also be refreshed.
- 3.11 One of the key priorities emerging from the PDP analysis for phase two will be to focus on the learning, understanding, confidence and support required for members to fully utilise the new 'My Councillor' portal when launched.
- 3.12 A series of portal demonstrations took place prior to the pandemic which has informed the design stage that is now nearing completion. Progress was temporarily delayed as officers were redeployed to assist with the Council's response to the pandemic. Recently, a pilot group of Elected Members was established, and it is anticipated this pilot will commence from September this year. Individuals with varying IT capability levels have been encouraged to participate in the pilot to make it as representative as possible. The design stage has involved extensive

system build, process and procedural arrangements with key services etc. that will be tested thoroughly during the 1-2 month pilot.

In addition, officers from the Council's Digital Transformation Team are working closely with Civic and Member Services on appropriate training guides and governance arrangements to ensure the portal is used correctly, efficiently and effectively with appropriate reporting available that can come back to this committee at regular intervals. Civic and Member Services will manage these governance arrangements following completion of the full launch.

Should the pilot be successful, with minimal amendments to the portal required, a phased introduction will commence preceded by extensive training that will be tailored to the skill set of individual members.

Officers have developed an indicative timeline to cover the period from pilot commencement to phased launch:

- Pre-pilot refresh and training August 2020
- Pilot starts September 2020
- Pilot concludes October 2020
- Lessons Learnt established and incorporated October 2020
- Phased pre-portal launch training starts November 2020
- Phased portal launch starts Jan 2021

The final two elements will also need to be caveated that they are subject to scoping any required changes post pilot. If the feedback requires any significant reworking of the platform or processes to incorporate, then this may take additional time to review/prioritise and develop.

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/Board and 'My Councillor' portal pilot group.

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 development activities, particularly relating to planning and licensing functions, ethical standards and the code of conduct 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. Support arrangements for Members identifying any specific needs will be developed accordingly.

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, including the design and implementation of the 'My Councillor' portal.

15 BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 None.

16 APPENDICES:

16.1 None