


Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

4 December 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 (MDP) 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 MDP and how Members have been supported by virtual/on-line learning and development interventions during the current pandemic. In addition, the report outlines the latest information on the 'My Councillor' portal pilot which was extended to 27 November and includes estimated roll-out arrangements in 2021. 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 2 update

- 3.1 The Elected Member Development Programme has been continually designed and led by Members.
- 3.2 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 earlier 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.
- 3.3 Due to the current pandemic, and subsequent service re-prioritisation, delivery of phase two has inevitably been affected, however, the move to virtual/on-line learning provision has been adapted to well by members who have participated.
- 3.4 For example, Artemis on-line learning has featured modules that directly correlate with issues arising from the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. These include:
- Domestic Violence and Abuse
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences
 - Poverty

An additional Healthy Outcomes module is currently at the testing stage and will be available in due course. Whilst take up has been encouraging in recent months, efforts are ongoing to encourage more members to undertake the various modules given the importance of the subject matter. There are other Artemis modules available to members and they are encouraged to view the catalogue at regular intervals, particularly when undertaking new portfolios or areas of responsibility.

- 3.5 Shortly after the first lockdown and following MS Teams training for all members which resulted in increased familiarity with using this platform, new virtual learning has also been offered which has been received well.

This has included:

- I-ACT Managing and Promoting Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing which was attended by 17 members during September and October. Due to positive and constructive feedback, received further sessions are scheduled for January and February 2021
- On 15 December an 'Understanding Extremism' course is taking place via MS Teams where all members will be encouraged to attend
- In some circumstances, where appropriate, Members have been signposted to relevant courses available via the LGiU and LGA sites and these have included; Chairing Skills for Virtual Meetings, Participating in Virtual Meetings and Presenting with Impact
- In December, a series of Mindset e-learning self-coaching modules will be rolled out for members to access. Initially they will include Wellbeing, Resilience, Mindfulness and Thriving During Isolation. This will be followed in the New Year by additional modules that will total 25 for members to choose from by the end of the roll out.

Additional Planned Member Development Activity

3.6 Priority requested 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 and Personal Safety training

This will form part of a virtual and on-line training plan to be offered to members from early 2021 up to the end of that calendar year. This will be co-ordinated following ongoing consultation with internal and external learning providers. The essential core learning modules provided during Phase One will also be included, and internal facilitators from the relevant service areas are currently working with Civic and Member Services officers. This will include Code of Conduct training which will be a priority for members of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee and Licensing committee members, due to new regulations.

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

- 3.7 Information, advice and guidance relating to learning and development opportunities have been circulated via regular direct e-mails and occasional Member Bulletins. Future communications will include reminders to access on-line learning as much as possible during this unprecedented period as it is unlikely traditional classroom style learning will be a viable option for some time.
- 3.8 Whilst the pilot and launch of the 'My Councillor' portal remains a priority for phase two of the MDP, Civic and Member Services will continue to carry out external research for suitable learning opportunities and make them available to members where appropriate.
- 3.9 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. This includes the design and launch of a new Cabinet Member induction guide. Ahead of the next Municipal election, the newly elected member induction arrangements will also be refreshed.

My Councillor portal design and pilot

- 3.10 The My Councillor portal has been designed based on initial feedback from members at the outset of the MDP. It is a personalised portal for members with an in-built casework management system integrated with CMIS. In addition, it allows elected members to access information and tools that are key to helping perform their roles as local representatives more effectively and efficiently.
- 3.11 One of the key priorities emerging from the PDP analysis for phase two was the focus on learning, understanding, confidence and support requirements 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 had informed the design stage prior to a pilot. Progress was temporarily delayed as officers were redeployed to assist with the Council's response to the pandemic. In September, a pilot group of 14 Elected Members was established. This pilot group contained individuals with varying IT capability levels who were encouraged to participate in order to make it as representative as possible. The design stage had involved extensive system build, process and procedural arrangements with key services etc. ahead of the pilot which commenced on Monday 5 October and was proposed to run for six weeks initially.

- 3.13 Officers from the Council's Digital Transformation Team have worked closely with Civic and Member Services to produce appropriate training guides/videos and begin to establish robust governance arrangements to ensure the portal is used appropriately, consistently, correctly, efficiently and effectively with detailed 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.
- 3.14 The pilot has already proven to be both robust and effective in identifying strengths and areas for improvement to address prior to a live launch. At the time of writing this report the pilot had been extended to Friday 27 November. The rationale for this extension was as follows:
- The take-up by some of the pilot members at the beginning of the pilot was a little slow, meaning only a small number of members and services used the product for in the first two weeks.
 - Those members who actively engaged with the portal in those first few weeks helped to root out a number of technical configuration issues and user errors. At the mid-point stage of the pilot, 77% of issues raised by pilot members had been resolved so it was important members had an extended opportunity to use the product with the improvements made following this initial feedback.
 - There had been quite limited feedback from officers, so extending the pilot gave an opportunity to push for more feedback during the closing weeks.
 - Although there had been over 80 counts of feedback from members for the 'Raise a new Case' functionality, we had not received feedback from members regarding any of the other functionality the portal offers. Extending the pilot, therefore, provided the opportunity for more feedback on the wider functionality
 - It should be noted, the average review left by members rose from 3 out of 5 stars as at 20 October, to 4 out of 5 stars as at 16 November which reflects the improvements in functionality accomplished during the pilot phase
- 3.14. Outside of scheduled training sessions, user guides, videos, practice platforms, a digital skills analysis and guidance, approximately 12 hours of 1-1 support has been provided to date for pilot members during planned surgeries to support with use, talk through feedback and assistance to help understand the platforms potential for them
- 3.15. Upon completion of the pilot, officers from the Digital Transformation Team and Civic and Member Services will analyse all feedback during December. This will involve consolidating key strengths and correcting outstanding functionality issues that could not be addressed during the pilot.

- 3.16. Depending on timescales required to amend or add any additional functionality, it is envisaged a phased roll out will commence early 2021. This will be 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 the end of the pilot to phased launch:

- Pilot concludes 27 November 2020
- Lessons Learnt established, incorporated and tested December 2020 and January 2021
- Phased pre-portal launch training starts February 2021
- Phased portal launch starts February/March 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 MDP 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, including the costs associated with the My Councillor portal, will be met from existing approved budgets.

7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 An effective MDP 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 MDP 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 MDP is initially a two-phase initiative designed to ensure Elected Members have the requisite skills, support and knowledge necessary to undertake their various roles. During phase two, a fundamental review will commence to consider how the MDP is enhanced and sustained from Autumn 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 phase two progress, this report will act as an update in relation to the progress of the programme, including the design, pilot and implementation of the 'My Councillor' portal.