

Report to Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

7 March 2023

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| Subject: | Member Development and Member Portal Update |
| Director: | Director of Law and Governance, Surjit Tour |
| Contact Officer: | Service Manager – Democracy Elaine Newsome Elaine_newsome@sandwell.gov.uk |

1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That the detail of elected member learning and development activity that has been delivered since the beginning of the Municipal Year be noted and Member views on the effectiveness of the initial programme be provided.
- 1.2 That approval be given to the approach to refreshing the Member Development Programme for 2023.
- 1.3 That the Chair of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee be authorised to agree the Member Development Programme following consideration by the Member Development Working Group.
- 1.4 That, in consultation with the Chair, the monitoring officer be authorised to set some performance indicator targets in relation to member training.
- 1.5 That the approach in relation to the review of the Member Portal be approved.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is mandated to have oversight of Member Development activity, with the aim of ensuring Councillors are appropriately supported in their roles.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

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|  | <p>Targeted Member Development activity aims to support all ambitions and objectives in the Corporate Plan.</p> |
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Member Development Programme aims to offer learning and development in support of Member effectiveness and confidence in their roles. A new and revised programme was implemented in 2022 that reflected the issues identified across external reviews and associated improvement plan whilst aiming to build on the programme developed over the previous 4 years.

Training and Member induction to date

- 4.2 External reviews at the beginning of 2022 identified a series of recommendations and areas of focus to move the organisation forward. These have influenced the content of the member development activities offered to date.



Whilst a number of programmed events are initially targeted toward newly elected Councillors as part of the induction programme, attendance is widened to include all Members, to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience. The learning and development events are offered over a variety of mediums and the use of external facilitators is incorporated where possible. In addition, Members are encouraged to access national programmes with the aim of networking and benchmarking with colleagues from other local authorities.

4.3 Learning and Development May 2022 to date:

| Learning & Development Activity | Date(s) | No. Attendees (* denotes limited spaces) |
|--|--|---|
| Service Showcase | 18 th May | 36 |
| Code of Conduct | 19 th /30 th May | 52 |
| My Councillor Portal | 19 th May | 12* (new Councillors) |
| Introduction to Scrutiny | 9 th June | 10* (new Councillors) |
| Scrutiny | 13 th June | 24 |
| Introduction to Local Government Finance | 14 th /21 st June | 6 |
| Introduction to Planning | 15 th June | 18 |
| Licensing (General) | 16 th /19 th June | 23 |
| Licensing (Taxis) | 14 th /30 th June | 27 |
| Planning Committee processes | 21 st June | 5* (Committee members) |
| Introduction to Audit, Fraud & Risk | 23 rd June | 29 |
| Health Scrutiny | 27 th June | 9* (Committee members) |
| Sandwell learn | 7 th /20 th /27 th July | 30 |
| Anti-Social behaviour | 2 nd August | 17 |
| Understanding extremism | 3 rd August | 16 |
| Universal Credit Overview | 8 th August | 13 |
| Recognising modern slavery | 9 th August | 18 |



| Learning & Development Activity | Date(s) | No. Attendees (* denotes limited spaces) |
|--|--|---|
| Committee Chairing Skills | 10 th August | 17* |
| Effective Member & Officer Relationships | 6 th and 20 th September | 55 |
| Public Speaking “getting the message across effectively” | 19 th October | 24* |
| Managing challenging situations | 2 nd November | 30* |
| Good Governance – Code of Corporate Governance | 22 nd November | 35 |
| Outside bodies | 28 th November | 5* |
| Social media | 1 st and 7 th December | 25 |
| Corporate parenting | 14 th December | 26 |
| Cost of Living webinar | 10 th and 11 th January 2023 | 11 |
| Member/Officer Service spotlight session | 13 th January | 32 |
| Effective Questioning and listening skills | 18 th January | 30* |
| British Sign Language and Deaf Awareness | 25 th January | 10 |
| Overall attendance | | 48.8% |

- 4.4 Feedback generally is that the programmed events to date have been well received, noting, however that some Councillors have highlighted the volume of development sessions that have taken place to date. Members attending development activities have highlighted that the mixture of in person and virtual events has been effective as it offers a flexible approach.



- 4.5 Included in the ongoing review of learning, development and support offered to members, personal development plans (PDPs) continue to take place in order that the offer for the 2023/24 programme is tailored toward the identified needs of Councillors. PDPs provide a platform for confidential one to one conversations on member achievements, aspirations and associated support going forward. The PDP's also capture skills, knowledge, experience and learning outside of the Council environment, to avoid duplication of learning and development activity

The approach to Member Development 2023/34

- 4.6 There are a number of factors influencing the development of the member programme for 2023/24. These include:
- Member induction: building on the successes of the last programme and bridging any identified gaps. All Councillors elected in 2022 will be invited to participate in information gathering sessions that aim to understand their experience of the member induction programme and consolidate the offer going forward;
 - New member intake and changes in positions of responsibility. As with any annual election, the Council prepares for its intake of newly elected Councillors and also those who may hold first time or new positions of responsibility. Alongside the induction and main development programme, this year will see the introduction of individual learning pathways that identify core development activities for members in positions of responsibility
 - Consolidating understanding of corporate governance responsibilities: the current programme sets out, across a number of strands, governance development activities. Going forward, it is proposed that there is a single corporate governance strand for all elected members, with additional enhanced activities for those members with specific governance related roles and responsibilities
 - PDP identified learning and development need: There has been limited uptake of member PDP's to date. This has impacted on the ability to undertake a wholly informed assessment of members learning and development needs. It is proposed that a final offer for PDPs for members not eligible for election in 2023 is made during March. Any further analysis can then be made and reported to the Member Development Working Group alongside the draft Member Development Programme in early April.



- 4.7 Due to the evolving position and associated timescales, it is proposed that following consideration by the working group, the final Member Development Programme is approved by the Chair of the Committee. This would allow for preparations to commence in advance of the election and in readiness for the start of the new Municipal year.

My Councillor Portal

- 4.8 The MyCouncillor Portal was introduced for Members in March 2021 and rolled out across the Council from June that year. the Portal aims to provide a platform for Councillors to access a range of local information, and to also act as a single point system for logging of service request and casework. In excess of 15600 service requests and case work items have been logged since its launch.

Since coming online, additional functionality now means that Members will soon be able to access real-time information on a range of issues including clusters of reports of common community service requests, for example fly tipping or pot holes. Any service requests logged on the MySandwell app now automatically link into the portal casework, so that Members are able to utilise both platforms.

- 4.9 Having gathered feedback on the portal, we know that there remain some issues around member usage and engagement. The majority of the feedback however, focuses around corporate responsiveness, including timeliness and quality of responses.
- 4.10 As part of the Council's improvement plan, a review of the portal will be undertaken as part of the wider "customer journey" activity. Members will be integral to the review and will be invited to take part in a number of focus group activities to explore their experience of the portal and its future usage.

5 Implications

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| Resources: | Training that forms the member development programme 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. |
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| Legal and Governance: | <p>An effective Member Development Programme will help ensure the council make informed decisions and empower Members in undertaking their various roles.</p> <p>Members in relation to regulatory matters/functions are required to undertake specific kinds of training such as planning, licensing, standards, safeguarding.</p> <p>Supporting Members in their development, training and support needs strengthens the council's governance arrangements.</p> |
| Risk: | Where engagement in learning and development is limited, there are risks associated with Members being insufficiently supported, particularly when undertaking statutory roles |
| Equality: | The revised Member Development Programme will address any Equality Act implications and issues arising. |
| Health and Wellbeing: | None in relation to this report |
| Social Value | The Member Development Programme has recently been reviewed and revised to ensure Elected Members have the requisite skills, support and knowledge necessary to undertake their various roles. |

6 Appendices

None

7. Background Papers

None

