

Non-Executive Report of the: Standards Advisory Committee Thursday, 16 January 2025	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Shupriya Iqbal, Director of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer	Classification: Open (Unrestricted)
Member Learning and Development Yearly Update	

Originating Officer(s)	Matthew Mannion, (Head of Democratic Services)
Wards affected	(All Wards);

Executive Summary

The Learning and Development Programme is the Council's professional development programme for Members. It provides access to training in relation to personal skills, professional development, council policies and local issues.

The Standards Advisory Committee is provided with annual updates to allow it to review and comment on the programme as part of its role in ensuring Members are able to properly undertake their role as set out in the Member Code of Conduct.

This report looks at the Member Learning and Development Programme from 1 December 2023 onwards and the Committee is asked to review and comment on this update report.

Recommendations:

The Standards Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. Review and comment on the report.
2. Review and comment on the Member Development Strategy attached as Appendix 1.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Member Learning and Development is provided to enhance a Councillor's knowledge and skills to ensure they are equipped to undertake their role.
- 1.2 The Council's Constitution notes that the Standards Advisory Committee is responsible for ensuring high standards of Member conduct which is facilitated by the provision of a good quality Member Learning and Development programme.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 This is a noting report. The committee may wish to propose alternative learning and development programme arrangements.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Council's ongoing Member Learning and Development Programme continues to provide opportunities for Members to expand on their knowledge and keep up to date with changes.

- 3.2 These opportunities are generally in the form of:

- Committee specific training targeted at certain councillors such as those on development or licensing committees, or Scrutiny.
- Training and development sessions scheduled as part of the annual learning and development plan, or identified as a training area during the year, offered to most/all Members.
- Member briefing sessions on policy areas/developments usually offered to all Members and provided ad-hoc when required.
- Programmes run by the LGA (or other external bodies) for councillors, often free of charge covering a variety of areas. These are advertised in the Members' Bulletin so Members can let us know if they are interested in attending.
- New for this year – individual training identified through a Member's Personal Development Plan and including mentoring and/or coaching opportunities.

- 3.3 This report looks back at the Member Induction Programme over the previous year from 1 December 2023 (which is when the last reporting period finished) and including the new Individual Member Training Budgets.

- 3.4 The report also looks forward over the next year and especially asks the Committee to start considering the need to develop a Member Induction Programme to follow the May 2026 local elections. Appendix 3 sets out the Learning and Development Programme for 2024/25 and progress against that plan.

LGA Member Learning and Development Charter Mark

- 3.5 The content of this report is also relevant to the Council's efforts to achieve the LGA Charter Mark. Progress towards that goal is presented in a separate report on the agenda.

Member Learning and Development 2024

- 3.6 **Overview** – The past year has been extremely busy in relation to Member Learning and Development and this report will look at a number of areas including:

- The Member Learning and Development Steering Group (and Member Development Strategy).
- Personal Development Plans and Individual Member Learning and Development Budgets.
- Development of Role Profiles.
- Training records and attendance through the year.

Member Learning and Development Steering Group and the Member Learning and Development Strategy

- 3.7 Having met for the first time in December 2023, the Steering Group has met three more times over the past year (March, August and November) to oversee the Learning and Development Programme.
- 3.8 The group receives regular reports such as those on the budget and upcoming training and also considers specific reports as appropriate, for example on progress towards the LGA Charter Mark accreditation.
- 3.9 Both political groups are represented on the Steering Group and ungrouped Members are also welcome to participate.
- 3.10 A key early piece of work was to review the initial Member Learning and Development Strategy which was developed as part of the LGA Charter Mark work with the aim of providing a document which sets out how Learning and Development should be provided at the authority.
- 3.11 The Strategy is presented at Appendix 1 for the Committee's information and comment. The strategy will undergo a review as part of the work to develop the Member Induction Programme for 2026.

Personal Development Plans and Individual Member Learning and Development Budgets

- 3.12 As noted in the last annual report to the Committee, the Council was exploring the idea of introducing Individual Member Learning and Development Budgets for all Councillors. Following discussion at the Member Steering Group and an agreed increase in the training budget to £60k/year, the programme was launched in the summer of 2024.
- 3.13 The scheme requires the Councillor to undertake a Personal Development Plan (PDP) and then this will be used to identify areas of development and courses to attend for that individual councillor. This means that they can be booked onto courses that are more focussed to their needs than if they were on general training.
- 3.14 Another goal of the new programme is that the increased budget will allow the council to provide more interesting/challenging externally run courses which will hold a greater appeal to Members (a point noted by the Committee last year).

- 3.15 Feedback from the assessor of the PDPs was that Tower Hamlets saw an excellent level of participation at over 2/3 of Councillors (31 out of 45 to date) and that engagement within the process was very good.
- 3.16 The Individual PDPs are confidential to the Members concerned which is seen as important in allowing Members' space to confidentially explore their own needs (something the Standards Advisory Committee identified last year), however a summary report setting out key findings and recommendations has also been provided by the assessor and will be shared with the Member Learning and Development Steering Group. Some of the key themes from the report are set out below:

- Key development priorities were identified for each Councillor and some of these features for over 30% of respondents and so could provide the focus for more general training. The themes were under the headings of:
 - Partnership working
 - Scrutiny and challenge
 - Regulating and Monitoring
 - Communication skills
 - **Providing Vision**
 - **Managing Performance**
 - **Excellence in Leadership**

(Those in bold were the most common areas identified)

- 3.17 However, the report also noted: "Only a limited number of clear development priorities were identified from within the core six competencies and this may have been a result of the strategic and structured approach to councillor development already provided for Councillors since the May 2022 election and the well-received Councillor induction programme."
- 3.18 Councillors were also surveyed on how they like to receive training. In relation to times/days, the largest response was for daytime/weekday training with a slightly lower number in favour of evening training. A smaller number opted for weekends. At present the Council will generally offer two options for each training session one during the day and one in the evening which would cover most preferences. LGA training is often at the weekend.
- 3.19 Equally, there was a small lead for a preference for training provided by external providers, although only slightly lower numbers were seen for internal briefings and virtual training. E learning was not seen as a preferred method by any councillors.
- 3.20 Given the multiple pressures on Members time both from their Councillor work and 'life in general' it is important to identify training dates/times that work best for them. Accredited training may also be more appealing than officer led briefings (a point raised at the Committee last year).

- 3.21 Next steps – Councillors are now being contacted individually to gain agreement to book them onto the training courses initially identified in their PDPs. After that officers will work with them on exploring the wider development areas identified. To support Members, officers are developing a ‘training brochure’ to give examples of the different types of training available and the likely costs so that Members can compare that to their priority areas and remaining budget.
- 3.22 **Mentoring and Coaching** – a specific goal of the programme is to provide all Members who have completed a PDP with the opportunity to work with a coach or mentor. This could be someone provided by the LGA related to the Member’s specific role/responsibility or a training or other professional identified through other means. The Council have a number of options they can offer but Members are also invited to make suggestions of suitable mentors/coaches. Potential mentors have now been identified for all Cabinet Members and officers will now work with other Members on the project to identify potential coaches/mentors.
- 3.23 It is important to note that the Individual Member Development process requires continual engagement from each individual councillor in order to identify useful training opportunities.

Councillor Role Profiles

- 3.24 Linked to the work to achieve the LGA Member Development Charter Mark has been the creation of Role Profiles for Councillors. The Profiles consist of a general Ward Councillor profile that applies to all Councillors and then further ‘add-ons’ that relate to specific additional roles that Councillors may undertake such as Committee Chair or Deputy Mayor. There is also a separate role profile for the Mayor.
- 3.25 The intention is that these:
- Provide clarity for both councillors and officers about what is required of each role.
 - Provide guidance in relation to the council’s Member Learning and Development Programme as to some of the key training that should be supported.
 - Supports councillors in their development by providing a checklist to identify their key development needs. Both for the roles they are currently undertaking and for future roles to support succession planning.
 - To provide the public and potential candidates with a guide as to the main roles undertaken by Elected Members and Co-optees. To help those considering whether to stand as candidates in the future.
- 3.26 The Role Profiles are published on the Council website on the ‘Be A Councillor’ web page.
https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgn/council_and_democracy/Be-a-councillor/Be-a-councillor.aspx

- 3.27 One outstanding action is to finalise a Role Profile for Co-opted Members. The intention is that this document will be agreed through a workshop for co-opted Members. This needs to be arranged.

Training sessions and attendance through the year

- 3.28 The Council has run a large number of Member training sessions and briefings with an average of nearly 2 training topics every month for Councillors as a whole (with more arranged for individual councillors, co-optees etc).
- 3.29 There is the usual wide range of topics covered from online safety through committee specific training to briefing sessions on policy areas such as the vaccination drive and new cohesion plan.
- 3.30 There have though been some specific areas of focus. For example, the Corporate Director, Resources has been running sessions to take Councillors through the budget looking at the general fund, capital/treasury and the housing revenue account.
- 3.31 These were well received with good attendance and a similar approach will be adopted for the budget process and additional modules will be developed to include management of financial risks and commercial contract management in the coming year.
- 3.32 There has also been a specific session for scrutiny Members on scrutinising the budget run by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. It is hoped that this work will support Scrutiny Members when they come to review the Budget and Council Tax proposals in early 2025.
- 3.33 Appendix 2 to the report sets out the usual list of training/briefing sessions and attendance along with a commentary on the data set out.
- 3.34 Training courses are advertised through the Member Bulletin and Outlook Calendar invitations. Officers will try and gather as much information as possible in advance so that Members can be provided with a good summary of the training so they can judge the value to themselves of attending (an issue raised by the Committee last year). More work is required in this area as getting hold of this information early enough can be challenging.

Co-optee Training

- 3.35 Co-opted Members are involved in training relating to their Committees and, as noted earlier, are given opportunities to meet each other at workshops (with a workshop due on the co-optee role profile), however, more work is required on considering a more general learning and development offer.

Member Induction Programme 2026

- 3.36 A key priority for 2025 is to agree the Induction Programme to follow the 2026 local elections.
- 3.37 Whilst feedback was generally good for the last programme, there are always improvements that can be made. Equally, new technologies and general familiarity with online meetings offers the opportunity to explore new ways of delivering the programme.
- 3.38 Key areas to discuss will likely include:
- The length of the programme and how much to provide in the first few weeks following the election.
 - Use of options such as virtual training and how much should be in person.
 - Are the right topics covered and how to provide briefings on all council service areas.
 - Incorporating the Personal Development Plan offer.
 - A potential 'buddy' system for new Councillors (as suggested by the Committee).
- 3.39 Preparation work will begin in consultation with the Steering Group and Members more generally and draft programmes will be shared with the Standards Advisory Committee, General Purposes Committee and officers as previously.

Next steps

- 3.40 The report sets out plans for the next period, in particular preparations for the Member Induction Programme. The draft Member Development Plan for 2025/26 is also attached at Appendix 3. The Committee are asked to comment on the report for officers to consider and action.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None specific to this report, however, balancing equalities needs is an important factor when providing a Member Learning and Development Programme.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.

- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

5.2 None specific to this report, however, a good Member Learning and Development Programme helps provide Members with the skills and knowledge to support the Council in meeting its statutory responsibilities in relation to Council services.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 There is a dedicated Member training budget of £60k which will fund the costs of this training. Spend against this budget is monitored by the Member Learning and Development Steering Group.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the authority.

7.2 This report demonstrates the Council's compliance with the above legislation.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- Annual Member Development Programme reports to the Standards Advisory Committee

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Member Learning and Development Strategy (to follow)
- Appendix 2 – Learning and Development Attendance 2024/25 (to follow)
- Appendix 3 – Member Learning and Development Plan 2025/26 (to follow)

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A