

<b>Standards Advisory Committee</b>  7 December 2023	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>Achieving the Member Learning and Development Charter Mark</b>	

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Matthew Mannion (Head of Democratic Services)
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards

### Executive Summary

This report updates the Standards Advisory Committee on the Council's intention to work towards the Local Government Association Charter Mark for Member Learning and Development.

The report in particular asks the Committee to:

- Endorse the work to achieve the Charter Mark.
- Review and comment on the draft Member Development Strategy.
- Agree to be champions of Member Learning and Development.

### Recommendations:

The Standards Advisory Committee are asked to:

1. Review and endorse the proposal to seek Member Learning and Development Accreditation.
2. To review and comment on the draft Member Learning and Development Charter.

## 1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Member Learning and Development provides vital support to all Members in their various roles on the Council. It is particularly valuable for those in key decision-making positions.
- 1.2 Under the direction of the Chief Executive, the Council is seeking to achieve Local Government Association Charter Mark accreditation for its Learning and Development work.

- 1.3 The benefits of this are two-fold. Firstly, it provides the Council and Members with assurance that the Learning and Development Programme provided to Members is of good quality and comparable to the best in local government. Secondly, it demonstrates to local residents that the Council takes the support of their elected Members seriously and understands their value to the organisation.
- 1.4 The recent LGA Peer Challenge informal feedback talked about Member Learning and Development and achieving the LGA Charter Mark will go towards demonstrating the necessary commitment to Learning and Development at the Council.

## **2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 The Council could decide not to adopt the Member Learning and Development Charter. This would not necessarily have a direct impact but would mean the Council lost a key opportunity for external endorsement.

## **3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 Member Learning and Development is the Council's professional development programme for Members. It provides training in relation to personal skills, professional development, council policies and local issues.
- 3.2 The Programme consists of four main parts:
- The Member Induction Programme which follows the local elections.
  - General Learning and Development available to all Members – mainly sessions taking place in year's two to four of the electoral cycle.
  - Member Briefing Sessions, usually organised by Services, to highlight or discuss key issues and service challenges.
  - (Usually external) training, development and conferences booked for individual Members where it is appropriate for their Council Role or for an identified training need.
- 3.3 Member Learning and Development is overseen by the Council's Standards Advisory Committee and supported administratively by Democratic Services.
- 3.4 A busy programme of training and development sessions are usually held each year and feedback is usually positive (for example the Member Induction Programme 2022 achieved an average score of 4.25/5 on the feedback survey forms).
- 3.5 However, as the Council undertakes its transformation journey, ensuring we provide the very best Member Learning and Development is crucial in equipping Members to play their vital role in this project. Whilst the current training programme has received good feedback it has not been evaluated externally to ensure it is offering the best support to Members and it is

recognised that not all Members currently engage and more needs to be done to widen this engagement.

- 3.6 In addition, the LGA Peer Review has recommended that Member Development should be strengthened to increase its focus on individual Councillors and roles in addition to the general training offered to all Members.
- 3.7 The Local Government Association Member Development Charter Mark has been designed to provide this evaluation and assurance to the Council. Key benefits of achieving the Charter Mark (as stated by the LGA) include:
- Councillor development needs are better understood and supported.
  - Demonstrates the value placed on councillors carrying out important, demanding and complex roles.
  - Councillors are more knowledgeable, skilled and effective.
  - Strengthens relationships with officers, residents and partners.
- 3.8 Support and evaluation services are carried out by South East Employers on behalf of the LGA and the cost is £3750 for each three-year evaluation.
- 3.9 In discussion with Members and officers it is being proposed that there is a significant value to the authority in achieving the Charter Mark for the reasons set out.

Member role in supporting their Learning and Development and the Learning and Development Steering Group

- 3.10 As well as having a responsibility for their own personal development, Members also have an important role to play in helping steer the content and style of the overall training programme.
- 3.11 This happens through a number of mechanisms, the main ones being completion of survey forms after individual training sessions, responses to wider surveys (for example on the overall Member Induction Programme) or through informal discussion with the team.
- 3.12 In addition, the Standards Advisory Committee oversees Member Learning and Development and receive a report each year on the training which has taken place and the plans for the next year to allow Members to comment formally should that be required.
- 3.13 In relation to the Member Induction Programme, this was signed off by both the Standards Advisory Committee and the General Purposes Committee (as well as CMT).

Member Learning and Development Steering Group

- 3.14 A requirement under the Charter Mark is that Members are provided with a more specific feedback mechanism to use throughout the year in the form of a

Learning and Development Steering Group. In particular, this forum can support the creation of the Member Development Strategy and Yearly Training Programmes (see below) before final versions are presented to the Standards Advisory Committee.

- 3.15 In consultation with the political groups on the Council, an initial informal steering group has therefore been formed. The group consists of two core Members from each political group but it is open to all Members to contribute should they wish. It is also the intention that this group will be formalised and added to the 'Other Bodies and Panels' section of the Council's Constitution as a further method of signifying the importance placed on Member Learning and Development. The Group met for the first time on Friday 1 December and verbal feedback will be provided to the Committee if necessary.
- 3.16 The forum is purely for consultation purposes and has no decision-making directive powers and it is intended it will be an entirely non-political forum where all Members are free to help support their own collective Learning and Development. The Standards Advisory Committee will continue to undertake its public role of monitoring Member learning and development through yearly reports and any further updates as required.

#### Member Learning and Development Strategy and Programme Plans

- 3.17 Another key requirement of the Charter is to create an overarching Member Learning and Development Strategy setting out the Council's aims and objectives. This Strategy should be agreed in consultation with Members and senior officers.
- 3.18 A draft strategy has been developed and is attached to this report. The Strategy is also being reviewed by the Steering Group and the final draft version will also be presented to the Standards Advisory Group for review.
- 3.19 Following the framework set out in the Strategy, yearly Member Development Programmes must be agreed and presented to Members. This will consist of the Member Induction for the year immediately following an election and then three regular Learning and Development Programme Plans based on expected mandatory/required training and courses identified as valuable to Members through discussion and feedback from Members.
- 3.20 The Programme for 2023-24 (including completed and planned sessions) is set out as Appendix 2 to this report.

#### Achieving the Charter Mark – work from across the Council

- 3.21 As well as the core requirements around Member Learning and Development, the Charter Mark also requires the Council to demonstrate a wider commitment to the work of Members including encouraging people to stand for election (e.g. supporting the LGA's Be A Councillor Campaign), links to young people (such as through the Young Mayor/Youth Council) or articles and stories highlighting the general work of our Members.

## Member Learning and Development Budget

- 3.22 Within the Member Allowances/Facilities cost code there is a £15k budget line to support Member Learning and Development. The Charter requires that the Council can demonstrate that its training budget is sufficient to meet the reasonable requirements for Member needs.
- 3.23 Historically this has been sufficient for the generalised training that the Council has provided. However, the aim to transform the Programme with more focus on individual Councillors and a related increase in external and specialist training means that the budget may need to be increased. This is being explored at the moment.
- 3.24 All training will still need to be linked to specific skills and/or roles being undertaken by the Members concerned.

## Role Descriptions and Personal Budgets

- 3.25 A requirement of the Charter is that Role Descriptions are prepared to set out the demands on Members both generally and related to specific jobs (such as Cabinet Member, Committee Chair, Leader of the Opposition etc). Role descriptions will also set out expected skills and, linked to that, key training requirements. These will be used, alongside Personal Development Plans to identify training needs for each individual Councillor.
- 3.26 As a method of highlighting that the Learning and Development Programme is there for all Members, regardless of their role, the idea of Personal Training Budgets is being explored. This would mean that each Member had a guaranteed minimum amount that could be spent on their training and development each year (needs linked to the Role Descriptions and their Personal Development Plan).
- 3.27 The budget would be a minimum, with additional spend possible where it was relevant to the Role.

## Timetable for achieving the Charter Mark

- 3.28 The full LGA Charter Mark Presentation is attached at Appendix 3 to this report. This sets out all the areas of work the Council needs to successfully demonstrate in order to achieve the Charter Mark.
- 3.29 It can be seen that there are an extensive set of requirements and the guidance is that the process is likely to take a significant amount of time, not least because it isn't enough to set up new bodies such as the Learning and Development Steering Group, there has to be evidence that they are embedded and are effective in their role.
- 3.30 It is therefore likely to take another year or more before the process is concluded. The Council is though looking to complete most of the changes

more quickly and then to use the remaining time to demonstrate the effectiveness of those changes.

- 3.31 The Standards Advisory Committee will have an important role to play in supporting this work and will be updated periodically.

#### **4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Providing support to all Councillors is a particular target of the Charter Mark evaluation with one specific strand being to review training engagement against protected characteristics.
- 4.2 It is therefore anticipated that achieving the Charter Mark will be helpful in ensuring proper support is available to all Members.

#### **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 Not specific to this report but Members who are well equipped to undertake their roles are in a better position to help the Council in all the above areas.

#### **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 Costs of any member training that is identified will need to be met from the members' training budget.

#### **7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- 7.1 Section 27(1) of the Localism Act 2011 requires a local authority to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the authority. The promoting and maintaining of high standards of conduct by the Mayor, Members and co-opted Members is set out in Part D of the Constitution as one of the roles and functions to be carried out by the Standards Advisory Committee.
- 7.2 Effective training is an essential part of the duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The proposals set out in this report demonstrate the

Council's ambition to provide effective training, and to show that the training provided is effective.

- 7.3 The matters set out in this report comply with the above statute and with the Council's Constitution.
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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- Yearly Member Learning and Development update reports to the Standards Advisory Committee

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Draft Member Learning and Development Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Member Learning and Development Programme 2023-24
- Appendix 3 – LGA Member Learning and Development Charter Mark Guidance

### **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