

Non-Executive Report of the: Standards Advisory Committee Thursday, 7 December 2023	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Janet Fasan Director of Legal and 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 January 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.

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 or 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.

- 3.3 This report looks back at the Member Induction Programme over the previous year from 1 January (which is when the last reporting period finished). The report also briefly notes plans for the next year although those are linked to the work to achieve the LGA Member Learning and Development Charter Mark discussed in a separate report.

Member Learning and Development 2023-24

- 3.4 In December 2022, a survey of Members provided feedback and suggestions for potential training for the 2023-24 municipal year. These suggestions (and other discussions) then formed the basis of the Plan for this year. The suggested items were:

- Public Speaking
- Chairing Skills
- Managing Casework / resident issues
- Community Leadership/Influencing/Engagement skills
- Dealing with abuse and intimidation
- Computer Skills
- Effective Scrutiny

- 3.5 All of the above have been run by now (in relation to Community Leadership/Influencing/Engagement skills – LGA Community Engagement training and LGA Leadership training for Executive Members have been provided).
- 3.6 The biggest in year change to the programme has been the initiation of the work to achieve the LGA Member Learning and Development Charter Mark (as set out in a separate report). Also, the team have worked hard to publicise external training offered to Members by organisations such as the LGA and there has been an increased uptake in some opportunities such as Leadership Courses and those on Member Safety.
- 3.7 Appendix 1 to the report sets out the Learning and Development Programme that has so far been completed or is scheduled for 2023-24. This includes additional training to those listed above where issues arose throughout the year or were planned for particular Committees. Note that where training happens during a Committee meeting (e.g. Pensions Committee) it won't be included in the list. Note that this list also doesn't include Member Briefings.
- 3.8 Appendix 1 also doesn't list training requested by individual councillors in relation to their specific roles (see Appendix 2).

Full Training record and attendance

- 3.9 Appendix 2 to the report sets out the full list of training sessions and Member briefings and attendance at those sessions. It should be noted that although all the training listed was open to everyone to attend, some will have been targeted to particular groups of Members e.g. Committee training.
- 3.10 Appendix 3 to the report sets out the training arranged for individual Members provided by the LGA. Most of the training listed is part of the LGA's ongoing programme of training for Executive Members (Cabinet).

Co-optee Get Togethers

- 3.11 A new feature of the Member Learning and Development Programme has been the get togethers arranged for Co-opted Members. The first of these was run in October 2022 and two further sessions have taken place during 2023/24.
- 3.12 The theme for the recent sessions has been Ethics and Probity with Co-optees being taken through a summary of the training provided to Councillors as well as highlighting how the Code of Conduct applies to them as Co-optees.
- 3.13 However, the sessions also provide a general opportunity for Co-optees to meet other Co-optees from different Committees and discuss issues of general interest. Feedback so far is that they find these sessions valuable and the current intention is to continue offering these get togethers approximately every six months.

- 3.14 The main take-away for consideration from the sessions has been that, although Co-optees generally felt supported in being inducted onto their own Committee (although that could still be challenging), they would really welcome a pack of more general information about the Council, how it was organised, key contacts and the like. As most of the Co-optees were on the Council's Scrutiny Committees this is something that officers will need to consider alongside colleagues from the Scrutiny Team.

Member Learning and Development Programme for 2024-25

- 3.15 The biggest influence on the programme for the third year of the electoral cycle is likely to be feedback from the recent LGA Peer Challenge. The final report is expected to be published in December and any actions from that will be used to target priorities for 2024-25. There is also likely to be a further push to encourage Members to take up individual skills training.
- 3.16 Individual Member Training Budgets – one idea up for discussion as part of the Charter Mark work is to provide each Member (Mayor/Councillor) with their own training budget. This must be used on courses that are relevant to their work as a Mayor/Councillor but it emphasises the importance that the Council places on every Member's training. It is expected that this will lead to an increase in Members taking on skills-based training more specific to their needs.
- 3.17 One event which is planned for the start of the 2024-25 programme is a repeat of the Directorate 'Speed Dates' evening which was one of the very first sessions ran as part of the Member Induction Programme in 2022.
- 3.18 In the Speed Dates, small groups of Councillors are taken round to meet each Directorate Leadership Team in turn to hear from officers on their priorities and to ask questions. Given there have been a large number of changes to senior management within the Council and that new priorities are emerging from the Strategic Plan and from the Council's Transformation Programme, it was thought that a repeat of the Speed Dates would be very beneficial to both Members and officers.
- 3.19 A date has not yet been set but the target is for it to take place shortly after the Annual Meeting of Council.
- 3.20 The Committee are asked to review this report and the initial planning for 2024-25 set out and comment as appropriate.

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 In the current year there is a dedicated Member training budget of £15k to fund the costs of training.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 Section 27 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.
- 7.2 Advising, training or arranging to train the Mayor, Members and co-opted Members is included in the Roles and Functions of the Standards Advisory Committee set out in Part D of the Constitution.
- 7.3 The matters proposed in this report comply with the above legislation and with the Constitution.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Summary Member Learning and Development Programme 2023 to date
- Appendix 2 – Attendance at Learning and Development Sessions
- Appendix 3 – Attendance by Members on specific LGA Leadership and similar courses

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