

For publication

Review of the Member Development Policy (GV050)

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	25 May, 2021
Cabinet portfolio:	Governance
Directorate:	Corporate
For publication	

1.0 Purpose of the report

1.1 To approve the revised member development policy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the revised member development policy be approved and implemented with immediate effect.

2.2 That a further review of the member development policy takes place after two years.

3.0 Reason for recommendations

3.1 To further develop and enhance our member development offer and to ensure the policy meets the changing needs of our elected members.

4.0 Report details

4.1 In recognition of the increasing expectations on our elected members, a review of member development was undertaken in 2017, beginning with the arrangements with the member development working group. The group was relaunched with new terms of reference that clarified responsibilities, powers, membership and support arrangements. Since 2018, the group have continued to meet regularly and have been working

to a clear range of objectives which are detailed in the Terms of Reference (Appendix 2).

- 4.2 The group played a key role in supporting the development of the member induction programme following the borough elections in 2019. With such a large amount of training to deliver in a short space of time, the views and suggestions from current members were instrumental in creating an interesting and diverse induction programme that gave returning and new members the skills they needed to carry out their councillor duties.
- 4.3 In March last year, the member development working group and democratic services team found new ways of innovating our member development offer so that it could continue virtually. From the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, members have received a weekly member e-bulletin which initially aimed to keep members up to date with the frequent changes to council services; as the restrictions have eased, the e-bulletin now spotlights training and development opportunities as well as important news from around the borough. Members can also access the council's aspire learning platform where they can complete online courses on a wide variety of subjects.
- 4.4 Following a short period of disruption to planned activities at the start of 2020/21, member development sessions have moved into a virtual format which has seen attendance at the sessions increase significantly and receive positive feedback. There has been 72% attendance at the three virtual sessions during 2021, a 24% increase on a similar three sessions during 2019/20. Feedback from the three sessions this year has shown that 78% of members found them very useful and 15% found them useful. The support from the political groups has also been influential in increasing attendance and engagement with member development activities. Courses offered through other providers, such as East Midlands Councils or the Local Government Association, have moved online which has opened up more opportunities as members are no longer required to travel to distant locations to attend courses.
- 4.5 The member development working group have oversight of the rolling member development plan. This plan contains the development sessions that are open to all members during the year. The plan is kept under constant review so that it can be flexible and reactive to changing needs such as the recent refresher data protection training in light of the increased use of remote means for communicating with council

employees and residents. The democratic services team are also working with the climate change officer to plan member development sessions in support of the climate change priorities.

- 4.6 Individual requests for training are submitted using an application process; members are asked to fill in a form for any training request, regardless of whether it incurs expenses, to enable the member and civic support officer to keep an up to date record of member development. The form is quick and easy to complete and gives us some key information to consider the request including how the elected member, the council and the community will benefit from the course or event. The budget for member development is monitored by the member development working group.
- 4.7 All this is brought together through the member development policy, attached at Appendix 1. The review of the policy has identified some minor changes such as updates to roles where job positions have changed, other changes are summarised below:
- i. Budget allocation – the policy has been updated to provide that 50% of the budget will be ringfenced for training for all members through the rolling development plan and the remaining amount will be made available for individual requests. The budget allocations will be reviewed in December and funding may be transferred from one area to another if there has been an underspend. Previously, most of the budget has funded individual requests for training; however, due to Covid, two courses were procured to deliver specific training to prepare members for conducting council meetings remotely which required a significant portion of the budget. Therefore, the working group felt it was important to ringfence a portion of the budget in case a similar situation arose again.
 - ii. Application form (Appendix 3) – the member and civic support officer will be responsible for receiving the application for training request form from the member and adding any further details such as alternative courses and budget costs. They will then send the form to the relevant group leader for approval. Individual groups are responsible for undertaking personal development reviews for their members against which applications for training can be assessed.

5.0 Alternative options

- 5.1 The alternative option is to not approve the changes to the policy. If the ringfenced budget is not secured there is a risk that all the budget could be spent on individual requests and, should an urgent need arise for all member training, there would not be the funding within the budget to meet that need.

6.0 Implications for consideration – Council Plan

- 6.1 One of the policy's key principles is "That learning and development will support the aims of the Council Plan and underpin our values." The borough's communities want the council to deliver high quality services, to be run and managed well and respond quickly and meaningfully to changing demands. The policy outlines how the council will support its elected members so that they can be successful in their roles.

7.0 Implications for consideration – Financial and value for money

- 7.1 A dedicated budget is available for member learning and development which is monitored by the member development working group.
- 7.2 When requests for training from individual members are received, members are asked to demonstrate the value of attending the session and the member and civic support officer researches other course options to ensure the council is receiving value for money.

8.0 Implications for consideration – Legal

- 8.1 There are no legal implications for consideration.

9.0 Implications for consideration – Human resources

- 9.1 The policy is delivered by the member development working group with officer support from the democratic services team within the corporate directorate. The human resources – learning and development team also play a vital role in supporting and advising on learning and development opportunities and needs for elected members.

10.0 Implications for consideration – Risk management

Description of the Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action	Impact	Likelihood
Lack of support in the member development policy from political groups.	H	M	The member development group is politically balanced and the group has contributed to the review of the policy. Scrutiny members have also been consulted on the revised policy and comments have been fed into the review.	M	L

11.0 Implications for consideration – community wellbeing

11.1 This policy supports community wellbeing by providing a training and development offer that ensures members have the necessary skills for their community leadership role.

12.0 Implications for consideration – Economy and skills

12.1 Economy and skills has been a key area of interest for member development. The democratic services team has worked with the Service Director Economic Growth to provide member briefing sessions and content for the member e-bulletin about key topics of interest on a regular basis and will continue to do so.

13.0 Implications for consideration – Climate Change

13.1 Virtual meeting technology has been used to allow training to take place remotely. Though this has primarily been due to the Covid-19 restrictions, it has significantly reduced the need to travel by vehicle for training sessions. Electronic feedback and application request forms are also used to reduce paper usage.

13.2 The climate change officer is supporting the democratic services team to develop member development sessions on climate change which will be

delivered during 2021/22 in support of the council's climate change priorities.

14.0 Implications for consideration – Equality and diversity

- 14.1 The democratic services team provide reasonable adjustments to enable all members to access member development sessions, this is provided on an individual basis.
- 14.2 The diverse needs of our communities are taken into account when planning our member development activity to ensure that our programme covers key equality, diversity and social inclusion issues and members are confident to support their communities on these issues.

Decision information

Key decision number	Non-key 196
Wards affected	All wards

Document information

Report author	
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Appendices to the report	
Appendix 1	Revised member development policy
Appendix 2	Member development working group terms of reference
Appendix 3	Application for member training