



**CONSTITUTION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE  
1 AUGUST 2024**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>MEMBERS SUPPORT STEERING: GROUP ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2023 – APRIL 2024</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF LAW AND CORPORATE SERVICES</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to enable the Constitution and Standards Committee to be appraised of the work during the 2023/2024 municipal year and ongoing planned work of the Members Support Steering Group (MSSG) The Constitution and Standards Committee will receive this report at the first meeting of each municipal year.

The report contributes to the Wirral Plan 2023 – 2027 in supporting the organisation in meeting all Council priorities. The Members Support Steering Group helps Members in their implementation of the five key themes within that plan: The report also provides a progress update of the implementation of the Members Learning and Development Strategy (MLDS).

This is not a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Constitution and Standards Committee is recommended to endorse and comment on the report.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The report provides the Members of the Constitution and Standards Committee with the opportunity to review, appraise and to contribute to the work undertaken by the Members Support Steering Group during the 2023/2024 Municipal Year and provides an update of the implementation of the ML&DS.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Not to submit a report to Committee. This was discounted as it was deemed appropriate to appraise the Constitution & Standards Committee on the work undertaken by the Steering Group.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Members Support Steering Group was established by the Constitution and Standards Committee at their meeting on 24 February 2021. The Group was a product of the merger of the former Member Support Group and Member Equipment Steering Group.

#### **3.2 Terms of reference**

The role of the Member Support Steering Group is to:

- provide cross-party strategic leadership to member learning, development, support so as to enable members to help deliver the Refreshed Wirral Plan 2021-2026 and its themes;
- provide cross-party strategic leadership to the member ICT offer to ensure that equipment, software and systems used by members enables them to effectively undertake their duties;
- Provide oversight on the development of the Member Portal;
- Ensure all members have the requisite skills, knowledge and attributes to be able to meet their varied duties and responsibilities;
- Actively promote, encourage and oversee member culture, development and support;
- Explore, research, gather insight, examine and develop and implement new innovative methods, approaches and initiatives to improve member culture, development and support.
- Drive continuous improvement in member culture, development and support within political groups.
- “Provide an overview of support to members in fulfilling their roles and duties as Councillors.
- Oversight of the Member Welfare Policy

- 3.3 Standard agenda items included an analysis of the new member induction Members ICT, Members Portal, the implementation of the ML&DS and the consideration of individual training requests by members.

## **Membership**

- 3.4 Nominations for membership were requested at the first meeting of the Constitution and Standards Committee, however Members of the Group do not necessarily need to be for members of the Constitution & Standards committee. The MSSG comprises of seven members, appointed by reference to political proportionality (3:2:1:1). Membership for the 2023/24 municipal year was as follows:

Councillors:           C Carubia (Chair)  
                              G Bennett  
                              C Cooke  
                              J Johnson  
                              T Laing  
                              T Murphy  
                              M Sullivan

## **Frequency of Meetings**

- 3.5 The Group met on four occasions during the 23/24 municipal year in September, November, January and April.

## **Work undertaken to during the municipal year**

### **Oversight of the Members Portal**

- 3.6 The Members Portal was rolled out to all Members December 2020 supported by a programme of training. Training on how to use the Portal is offered to all Members annually as part of the New Member Induction Programme. The Portal offers a number of facilities for Members to utilise but a primary goal on implementation was to make the process of reporting cases and casework management more efficient and user-friendly for Members. During the previous municipal year, Members of the Steering Group were kept updated with developments to the portal including:
- Migration of reporting functions
  - the introduction of an escalation feature; and
  - the adaptation of the general enquiry form
- 3.7 Alongside reporting cases the Portal also serves as a domain for Members to gain additional relevant information they need to assist in undertaking their role. A useful tool is the training library which hosts recording and training clips which is regularly updated. Following the May 2023 election, training material was migrated to Flo, the council's learning and resource base. This ensures that a database is maintained and used as a bank of support.

3.8 Following requests from Members, through the MSSG, on Monday the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023 a formal escalation process went live via the Members Portal. This enables members to escalate an existing referral should it exceed the prescribed ten working day response target. Escalations are owned by Assistant Directors/Heads of Service who ensure that a detailed response is provided to the Member via the Members Portal.

The main aims of this functionality are as follows:

- To improve the experience for Members and make querying a case easier
- To ensure the full history of the case is kept against the case itself, rather than across emails and phone calls. This ensures continuity and allows multiple officers to assess progress to date for each escalation. Members will only have one place to look for all interactions per case
- To increase response efficiency via one clear platform for all escalations

3.9 In January, Members of the MSSG responded to a question that was asked at full council in December 2023. with regards to the message 'case closed' Members of the MSSG were informed that the use of the automatic system generated 'case closed' message has now been discontinued and training and engagement sessions have been held with officers in order to improve responses.

3.10 The Members Portal Protocol (appendix 1) was updated during this municipal year to reflect changes since the portal was first introduced to members four years ago, such as the escalation process

3.11 Members received reporting figures on a quarterly basis, which are now produced through Power Bi. Of particular note, the data demonstrated how:

- there are now less direct emails to officers;
- all councillors are using the portal to report cases;
- on an average month over the past four months, the average number of cases per month reported per councillor was 15; and
- the top three enquiries in a six-month period (October 23 – April 24) were in relation to street lighting, fly tipping and pavements.

### **Analysis of the new member induction**

3.12 A comprehensive survey was sent out to all new members at the end of July asking them to evaluate the programme as a whole. The findings were presented to the MSSG and evaluated as below:

- 100% of respondents found the new member induction day either extremely useful (71%) or somewhat useful (29%)
- Members rated the material received following their election as a Councillor i.e. new members induction booklet and associated documents as 4.1/ 5
- 92% of respondents felt that the induction programme in its entirety was sufficient to best introduce them to the Council.

- 31% would prefer in person training for all courses, 69% would prefer a mix of in person and in teams whilst no respondents wanted to receive training wholly through teams.
- 73% of respondents were highly satisfied with the new member induction part II, 9% were satisfied, whilst 18% answered 'other'
- 25% of respondents were very satisfied with the facilities at Birkenhead Town Hall, 58% were somewhat satisfied and 17% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied.

## **Overseeing the implementation of the Member Learning & Development Strategy (ML&DS) 2023-2027**

3.13 Members of the Steering Group provided the expertise and oversight of the development of Strategy and the forum was used to consider the drafts in October 2022 and January 2023. Suggestions made at the Steering Group were incorporated into the final version approved by the Constitution and Standards Committee in February 2023. It is worth noting that the final strategy was endorsed by colleagues at the Local Government Association as well as political peers on the Independent Assurance Panel.

### **Year One**

- 3.14 The ML&DS set out targets as displayed in in appendix 2. All the mandatory training was completed with the majority of the specific and specialist training also completed with the exception of Media and GDPR training that will be held following the August recess.
- 3.15 In addition to the year one plan as set out in the ML&DS, all members were surveyed to which 32 responded, further helping to shape the programme for the year.
- 3.16 Furthermore, there was some additional training provided throughout the year that were not explicitly identified within the survey or the ML&DS but welcomed by members.
- 3.17 Throughout the course of the year the following training events and workshops were arranged and facilitated for members:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Training</b>	<b>Internal/ external</b>
12 May 2023	Teams/ Portal/mod.gov training	Internal
15 <sup>th</sup> May 2023	From candidate to councillor/ code of conduct training	Internal
30 <sup>th</sup> May 2023	Planning Committee training	Internal
1 June 2023	Finance training	Internal
5 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Constitution and Decision making	Internal
6 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Licensing training	Internal
7 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	ARMC training	External
12 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Chair training	External – Bethan Evans
7 <sup>th</sup> – 19 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Intro to policy committee sessions	Internal
28 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Corporate Parenting Training	Internal

5 <sup>th</sup> July 2023	Children's Safeguarding	Internal
11 July 2023	Chair's training	External – LGA
14 <sup>th</sup> July 2023	Partnership meeting	External
27 <sup>th</sup> July 2023	The Local Plan	Internal
27 <sup>th</sup> September 23	Rules of Debate- motions, amendments and questions	Internal
12 <sup>th</sup> October 23	Members portal engagement	Internal
11 March 24	'Effective speaking – getting your voice heard'	External
28 <sup>th</sup> March 24	All Member Scrutiny Training	External

- 3.18 Individual training requests were received from a total of 6 councillors, all of which were agreed by the MSSG.
- 3.19 Not only were physical training sessions facilitated, there was also material identified and added as pathways on Flo from a range of sources including LGA, Centre for Public Scrutiny and internal providers.
- 3.20 In addition, the Members Support Team have offered sessions individually to councillors who require support on a regular basis.

### **Next Steps**

3.21 The Members Support Steering Group will continue to meet and analyse year 2 of the implementation of the ML&DS, future plans are as follows:

- Media training for committee chairs
- Annual training for committee members
- Refreshed code of conduct and finance training
- Partnership event for all members
- Members to be surveyed to explore their training needs
- Portal workshop sessions
- A review of councillor safety

### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The majority of Member Training is provided in house by council officers, however there have been a number of training events that have been provided by external individuals or agencies. Should there be a cost implication the Members Support Steering Group is consulted and if the majority do not agree to the spend an ad-hoc meeting can be arranged to discuss concerns.

4.2 During the financial year (1 April 23 – 1 April 24) the total cost for Members Training was £6,296. This included individual training courses as requested by Members and costs for external trainers providing sessions for all Councillors. Prudent budget management enabled the group to meet all requirements of the programme as well as agreeing to Member requests whilst remaining below the e annual training budget of £10k.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 Members Development is included within job packages of two members of staff working in Democratic Services with HR and organisational development support .

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 If the Members Support Steering Group fails to meet and be consulted regularly there could be ineffective oversight on development of individual members.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 Members of the Steering Group are consulted and reported to during meetings in the municipal year and as and when necessary.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 Whilst there are no equality implications arising directly from this report, members who need reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 will be given bespoke support where required.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Where possible training is delivered virtually as a means to prevent unnecessary carbon emissions in car journeys.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Elected Members are committed to improving the lives of the people across Wirral and that is at the core of the work we do. Wirral Council will continue to develop our Social Value agenda in all procurement where relevant and proportionate to ensure that businesses we contract with, are supporting our local communities and adding value beyond their contractual requirement.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Members Portal Protocol

Appendix 2 – Members Learning and Development Strategy

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The Role of a Councillor – Local Government Association

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Councillor – University of Birmingham

Highlighting Political Leadership – Local Government Association

Constitution

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Constitution and Standards Committee</b>	<b>June 2023</b>