



CONSTITUTION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 24 February 2021

REPORT TITLE:	MEMBER SUPPORT STEERING GROUP
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report sets out a proposal to combine the work of the Member Development Steering Group and the Equipment Steering Group into one Member Working Group to establish a Member Support Steering Group. The Steering Group is not proposed to necessarily be made up of members of the Constitution and Standards Committee.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Constitution and Standards Committee is requested to:

- 1) Establish a Member Support Working Group, combining the support work previously undertaken by the Member Development Steering Group and the Equipment Steering Group;
- 2) Submit membership nominations via the Political Groups to the Director of Law and Governance to form the Steering Group on the basis seven members, being:
 - 2 Labour
 - 2 Conservative
 - 1 Liberal Democrat
 - 1 Green Party
 - 1 Independent
- 3) Request the Director of Law and Governance to arrange a meeting of the new Steering Group in March 2021, with quarterly meetings thereafter.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 Following the adoption of a new form of governance arrangements for Wirral Council decision making, there is required to be a renewed focus on Member Learning and Development. As with all decisions, it is imperative that elected Members are involved at the earliest opportunity, with pre-decision scrutiny and cross-party engagement. Past practice using the establishment of steering groups, workshops, surveys and consultation has proven successful.
- 1.2 There are currently 2 separate steering groups in existence (Member Development & Equipment) and it is recommended that the creation of a new group, with a larger membership, will enable a more strategic long term approach to develop and support elected Members in their roles. It is anticipated that more frequent meetings will better balance officer capacity and Member availability, improving outcomes for elected Member support.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options considered:

a) retain the existing 2 steering groups; or

b) refer all decisions involving Member Development and Equipment to the relevant Council Committee for consideration on a case by case basis.

- 2.2 In terms of Option a) above, although this approach has worked well in the past, the rapid change of pace in terms of policy (as a result of the change in governance arrangements), and increased use of technology as a result of the COVID pandemic, have increased the need for more Member engagement and focus on aspects of Member Learning, IT and planning for the future.
- 2.3 With reference to Option b), although encouraging broad engagement of elected Members through the Committee timetable, the flexibility and focus of Steering Groups has proved to be a successful method of consensus building on specific issues.
- 2.3 Neither alternative options are supported as viable options for effective delivery of a strategic approach to Member Development and IT management.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Member Development Steering Group was formally established in the Municipal Year 2016/17, first meeting on 13 December 2016. It currently comprises of 5 Members. Most recently, this group has been meeting 'virtually' on an ad-hoc basis to review Member requests for training and/or attendance at conference. No formal strategic planning had been undertaken since consultation was undertaken as part of

the preparation of a Member Induction Programme for the (postponed) 2020 local elections. The most recent meeting of the Steering Group held on 23 November 2020 – addressed this, and considered a range of subjects that included:

- Member Learning Update Report;
- Members' Portal;
- Member One-to-Ones; and
- Process Flow Chart.

3.2 The Member Equipment Steering Group was established in July 2018 and met on a very occasional and informal basis since its formation. Prior to this, Individual elected Members acted in voluntary roles to test certain IT equipment or prototype software products prior to roll-out to other Members of the Council.

3.3 It is intended that the Steering Group adopts a work programme approach to the monitoring of member learning covering aspects of formal learning and IT e.g. the Member Induction Programme; ad-hoc learning arising from Member requests and/or updates in terms of statutory guidance and procedural changes affecting Council services; and programmed review of Member IT and software products.

3.4 Members views are requested on the size and make up of the new Steering Group. It is suggested that, taking into account the additional workload of a combined group, membership be extended to include seven Members, which would enable representation from all political groups of the Council on a political proportionality of:

- 2 Labour
- 2 Conservative
- 1 Liberal Democrat
- 1 Green
- 1 Independent

Nominations to be provided to the Director of Law and Governance from the Political Groups, with membership drawn from the entire Council, not necessarily or solely from the Constitution and Standards Committee.

3.5 Draft Terms of Reference are attached at Appendix 1.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. All actions arising from recommendations will be met from existing Member Training and Democratic Services Budgets.

Note: Major IT projects involving procurement of IT equipment or software for Councillors are built into the Corporate Budget – to ensure compatibility across the Council - e.g. Purchase of Surface Pros for Members, Windows 10 upgrade, ModGov Apps, etc.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Aspects of IT security, GDPR will (must) form part of Member Induction, any recommendations arising from the Steering Group will be ratified by the Constitution and Standards Committee. Such matters will be covered by the Council's existing governance procedures and relevant protocols as summarised in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance and Constitution.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Steering Group administrative support and approved costs will be met from existing Democratic Services and Member budgets.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 No specific risks associated with the decision to merge the two Steering Groups. Members are aware of the requirement to be conversant with statutory guidelines and legislation relating to their roles – the mechanism of regular monitoring of legislation and regular review of training opportunities (on an individual and group basis) will mitigate risk of reputational damage to the Council and possible legal challenge or complaints against elected Members.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The role of the proposed amalgamated Steering Group incorporates those of the pre-existing Steering Groups, and general discussion on the proposal has been undertaken with Political Group Leaders and discussed at the Governance Working Group where these Members were in support of the proposed amalgamation.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report. 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.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Draft Member Support Steering Group Terms of Reference

BACKGROUND PAPERS

New Member Induction Booklet
Member Learning & Development Booklet
Council Constitution