



CONSTITUTION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday 22 February 23

REPORT TITLE:	MEMBERS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023 - 2027
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Committee with a proposed Members Learning and Development Strategy (ML&DS) that reflects the importance placed on the provision of quality learning and development for all Members.

Ahead of the planned whole Council elections scheduled for May 2023, there is an opportunity to introduce and deliver a strategy that will ensure consistent and well established plans to best develop Members through their four-year term of office.

The Strategy will provide Members with the opportunity to develop skills and learning which will assist with their roles as decision makers and within the community. It will also support their wellbeing and safety.

The Wirral Plan 2021-2026 sets out the Council's vision to secure the best possible future for our residents, defined by the community prosperity we create and supported by our excellent people and services. The Members Support Steering Group (MSSG) and associated work helps Members in their implementation of the five key themes within that plan:

- Sustainable Environment
- Brighter Futures
- Inclusive Economy
- Safe and Pleasant Communities
- Active and Healthy Lives

This matter affects all wards. This is not a key decision.

The report contributes to the delivery of all five Wirral Plan 2021-2026 Priorities by ensuring that the Council's decision-making process is as effective as possible.

RECOMMENDATION

The Constitution and Standards Committee are recommended to note the contents of this report and to approve the Member Learning and Development Strategy 2023-27.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Strategy was formulated over Summer 2022 in response to recommendations of an External Assurance Report and the Local Government Association (LGA) peer review. The need to improve the quality of training and development options available to Members was highlighted as a priority.
- 1.2 A decision made by Council in March 2022 resolved to move to Whole Council (or 'all-out') elections with effect from the Local Elections to be held in May 2023. This means that all 66 Members of the Council will be up for election. Potentially, this could mean larger than usual numbers of new members and therefore a clear strategy should be in place ahead of their election to best induct them to the Council.
- 1.3 The initial drafts of the ML&DS was presented to the MSSG in October 22 and January 23 Members feedback and comments have been incorporated. In addition, the LGA and a neighbouring authority have been consulted on best practice. A copy of the final draft was also circulated to Member Support Officers and the Strategic Leadership Team for feedback.
- 1.4 It is important that a strategy is implemented in order to progress a robust and structured approach to members learning and development.
- 1.5 The MSSG provides the appropriate forum for ratification and discussion on policy and strategies involving the progression of the Members Learning and Development Strategy. Input and guidance from a Members perspective is essential to the implementation and progression of the strategy.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 To continue with the current approach to developing Members without a clear Learning and Development strategy or framework to support Members. This has option has been discounted, due to the recommendations of the external assurance panel and LGA and due to the likelihood of increased numbers of newly elected Members.
- 2.2 To sign up to a Members Learning and Development Charter supported by either North West Employers or the LGA whereby a package of training is identified to meet individual needs and reported back and monitored regularly.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project Group

- 3.1 Following a change of governance arrangements, an external assurance review and a peer review challenge a project group was established to consider existing and ongoing arrangements for member learning and development. The project group was set up and continues to meet on a weekly basis consisting of Democratic Services

and HR Officers with the objective to produce a Members Learning and Development Strategy.

3.2 The approach to members development had typically consisted of:

- An induction programme consisting of a package of training vital to understand local government practices for example; code of conduct training, decision making in a committee system and local government finances;
- Mandatory training pertinent to membership on certain committees such as Planning and Licensing and associated committee training for example chairing skills;
- Topical training such as climate emergency training, social media and bitesize training sessions on specific aspects of council finances delivered either through workshops or virtual training sessions via Microsoft Teams; and
- Ad-hoc events, usually In response to specific requests by members to undertake training in order to add value to their role as Councillor or position on a committee.

3.3 The first task was to gain an insight from existing members by asking for an analysis of developmental needs. A summary of the findings are appended to this report and listed below

- the need for more material on finance matters;
- further and more comprehensive IT training;
- themes surrounding better support for mental health and wellbeing support for constituents and support and advice for constituents on financial and housing concerns;
- request for training on policy and strategy developments;
- requests for development of personal communicative skills such as meeting skills and public speaking.

3.4 The draft strategy was informed by findings as listed above and summarised within the appendix. It was further informed by the objectives as set out within the Wirral Plan and in line with associated guidance from the LGA and neighbouring authorities.

Role of the Members Support Steering Group

3.5 Members of the Steering Group provide the expertise and oversight of the Strategy and the forum was used to present the draft as appended to this report in October 2022 and January 2023. Suggestions made at the Steering Group have been incorporated into the final version of the strategy.

Following implementation in May 2023

- 3.7 A four-year training programme will be introduced and followed accordingly. A comprehensive induction programme will be shared with the MSSG at the next scheduled meeting.
- 3.8 Refresher training will be conducted on an annual basis with regards to mandatory training and reviewed in line with an analysis of member's needs.
- 3.10 Following a by- election a clear plan will be in place in order to induct the new member.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the production of the strategy as this is met by existing full time permanent members of staff.
- 4.2 A budget of £10,000 has been set aside annually to meet all training needs. Where possible training will be delivered internally in order to save on costs.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report as the production of the strategy is met from existing officers.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Resources and staffing are already met from existing staff in the democratic services and HR teams.
- 6.2 Training material will be kept and retained on 'Flo' so that Members can access training videos as and when necessary. This will prevent the need for further training sessions that some members may have not been able to partake in at the scheduled time.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 To not deliver a robust members development programme as supported by strategy could impede on the effectiveness of Members being able to undertake their role.
- 7.2 To not implement a strategy could mean that momentum could be lost and an ad hoc approach would continue that would not be widely beneficial.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A members needs analysis was completed by 33 members and the findings were used to feed into the strategy.
- 8.2 Further consultation was undertaken with neighbouring authorities, peer review, and conversations with the LGA.

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.

There are no equality issues arising from this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications generated by the recommendations in this report.

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.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Anna Perrett/ Victoria Simpson**
Principal Democratic Services Officer/ Senior Democratic
Services Officer
email: annaperrett@wirral.gov.uk/victoriasimpson@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Members Development Strategy 2023 – 2027

Appendix 2 – Members Development Programme 2023 – 2027

Appendix 3 – Member Welfare Resource 2023 - 2027

Appendix 4 – Members Resource Booklet 2023-2027

BACKGROUND PAPERS

LGA Resources – ‘Being a Councillor’,

LGA – Highlighting Political Leadership – Leadership essentials

LGA – ‘Writing a Councillor Development Strategy’

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
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Members Support Steering Group	17 January 2023 18 October 22

Terms of Reference

(e) to oversee and approve the operation of the Council's functions relating to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct amongst members and co-opted members of the Council including: (i) approving and issuing guidance to Members (ii) making recommendations to Full Council regarding the suggested amendment of the Members' Code of Conduct (iii) approving training to be provided to members in the Code of Conduct (iv) monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct