



CONSTITUTION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

12 June 2023

REPORT TITLE:	MEMBERS SUPPORT STEERING GROUP ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2022 – APRIL 2023
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to enable the Constitution and Standards Committee to be appraised of the work during the 2022/2023 municipal year and ongoing planned work of the Members Support Steering Group. The Constitution and Standards Committee will receive this report at the first meeting of each municipal year.

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 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 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 2022/2023 Municipal Year.

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 newly formed 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 Membership

Membership is appointed from the Constitution and Standards Committee and comprises of seven members, appointed by reference to political proportionality. Membership for the 2022/23 municipal year was as follows:

Councillors: P Gilchrist
C Cooke
J Johnson
K Greaney
P Stuart
J McManus
S Williams

3.4 Frequency of Meetings

The Group met on three occasions during the previous municipal year in July, October, and January. It is proposed that the group meets in July, November, January and March during the municipal year.

Work undertaken to date

3.5 Members Portal

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 portal including: Migration of reporting functions, the implementation of a notes feature and the sign posting to Members training resources.

3.6 Alongside reporting cases the Portal also serves as a domain for Members to gain all the relevant information they need to undertake their role. A highlight is the training library recordings and clips which is regularly updated. Following the May 2023 election training material was migrated to Flo, the council's learning and resource base which holds a record of training attendance.

3.7 On Monday the 15th 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 the new 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

Early indications suggest that the new function is being well used. Further orientation sessions will be offered to all Members to maximise the utilisation of the new addition and the Member Support team are on hand to provide additional support .

3.7 Member Learning & Development Strategy 2023-2027

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. The Strategy was approved by Committee in February 2023.

3.8 New Member Induction

The 2023 Local Elections saw the arrival of 23 new Members on to the Council. This followed 11 in 2021 and 14 in 2022 .The Members Support Steering Group were instrumental in contributing to the new Member Induction Programme for 2023/2024 as attached as an appendix to this report (appendix 1). They also reviewed and approved updates to the material circulated to new members upon election night (Appendix 2). New Member Induction Day was held in Birkenhead Town Hall on the 10th May 2023 attended by all the new members. Training courses will run throughout May/June and July. A survey of new members will be conducted later in the year with the outcomes reported to the Steering Group.

3.9 For 2023/2024 a number of new training opportunities were included in the programme:

- All Member Finance
- Pensions
- Committee System and Decision-Making
- Corporate Parenting
Carbon Literacy
- Mental health awareness and wellbeing
- Social Media

3.10 A new approach to committee specific training has been to invite members of committee to a session prior to the first meeting of the municipal year so that they may be briefed upon the work programme, the budgetary situation and to meet other members of the committee as well as key council officers including Directors and Assistant Directors.

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 22 – 31 March 23) the total cost for Members Training was £3, 394. This included individual training courses as requested by Members and costs for external trainers providing sessions for all Councillors. The annual training budget of £10k is overseen by the steering group.

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 – New Member Induction Programme May 23
Appendix 2 – Member Induction Booklet 2023 – 2027
Appendix 3 – Members Learning and Development Strategy 2023 – 2027

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Role of a Councillor – Local Government Association

The 21st Century Councillor – University of Birmingham

Highlighting Political Leadership – Local Government Association

Constitution

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date