

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Audit and Governance Committee



I. PURPOSE

- I.1. This report presents an overview of member development activity which took place during the 2021/22 financial year and our ambition for the 2022/23 municipal year.
- I.2. The Head of Governance Performance and Risk is the officer responsible for member development and is in turn supported with administration by the Chief Executive's Office. Member development has been identified as a service priority for the year 2022/23.
- I.3. Member development is a key enabler in supporting elected members to undertake their role well. Here in Plymouth it comprises of both internally and externally delivered training and briefing sessions, Local Government Association (LGA) online training materials accessible via the Councillors' Toolkit and online training courses accessible via the LGA.
- I.4. The cost of some externally delivered training is included in LGA subscription costs (apart from travel and subsistence) and other packages cost up to £1,000 (e.g. for LGA Leadership Academy place).

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2. Overview

- 2.1. The pandemic on the delivery of councillor development activity over the 2020/21 and 2021/22 municipal years.
- 2.2. Although curtailed, councillor development activity did still take place and included a focus on ensuring that councillors were able to operate technology effectively, enabling them to focus on their core role and maintain attendance at meetings.
- 2.3. This took the form of group sessions with political groups, targeted sessions with individual councillors who had less experience/IT confidence and one to one sessions councillors with specific roles or those who were shielding. These sessions were delivered by the Democratic Support Team.
- 2.4. Training/briefings on committee functions was provided at the beginning of the municipal year to ensure councillors were fully briefed and trained for their relevant committees/to understand their statutory duties.
- 2.5. Other channels were utilised and promoted to support development, and included workbooks (from the LGA) and e-learning (e.g. Committee Chairing skills for new Chairs). These materials continue to be made available through the Councillors' Toolkit.
- 2.6. The Council also has access to training courses offered by the LGA such as the mandatory equality and diversity training, most of which are free to attend (excluding expenses), and has offered to be a host site for courses/briefings offered by the Local Government Innovation Unit (LGiU).

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3. Induction

3.1. We took a fresh approach to member induction for 2022. The new approach was informed by previous discussions with councillors on their reflections of what worked well and what could be improved, a review of practice at other councils and the opportunities working through MS Teams provides.

3.2. Previous feedback from the political groups included the following:

- Avoiding overwhelming new Councillors with information during their first few days of office
- A focus on activities that enable new Councillors to effectively and efficiently engage with their residents as soon as possible after election (e.g. timely access to IT and telephone equipment; how to raise casework; who to contact for commonly raised issues by residents)
- Viewing induction over a 3-6 week period, timetabling activities at relevant points in the municipal calendar
- A focus on identifying and providing the statutory aspects of induction/refresher training required

4. Induction and ongoing development approach

4.1. As part of the induction a welcome event took place which was designed to be as short as possible with only essential information being provided, statutory processes being undertaken and relevant equipment being provided. The session included the opportunity to speak with some existing councillors and the council’s senior leadership team before a scheduled programme of MS Teams sessions began.

4.2. The use of MS Teams enabled us to deliver sessions in the afternoon / evening in an attempt to lessen the impact on new councillors with other commitments and allow for existing councillors to take part.

4.3. The programme of MS Teams “context sessions” provided officers an opportunity to set out the breadth and depth of delivery of services and some of the challenges being faced. These took place on the MS Teams platform and are available on the Councillors toolkit.

| Context Setting Sessions | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Childrens’ Services | To provide all councillors with an understanding of directorates’ - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Priorities and future plans • Performance, Risks and Opportunities • Customer experience • Budgets and resources • Service or organisational review/inspection (if applicable) • Councillor Q&A |
| People | |
| Public Health | |
| Customer and Corporate Services | |

- 4.4. In addition to the context sessions, and following the Annual General Meeting, training sessions specific to committees were delivered and are be available on the Councillor Toolkit.

| Statutory/role specific training | |
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| Corporate Parenting | To ensure councillors are fully briefed on their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent. This is statutory annual training. |
| Chief Officer Panels | Training Specific to the work of the Committee. |
| Planning | Training Specific to the work of the Committee. |
| Licensing | Training Specific to the work of the Committee. |
| Taxi Licensing | Training Specific to the work of the Committee. |
| Audit and Governance | Training Specific to the work of the Committee. |
| Child Safeguarding | To ensure Councillors fully understand their responsibilities. |
| Code of Conduct Training | To ensure Councillors fully understand their responsibilities following the adoption of the new code of conduct |

- 4.5. Partner organisations have been asked to provide an introduction as part of the induction process. The Integrated Care System Devon (NHS Devon) session has taken place and is available on the Councillor Toolkit. Further sessions are currently being planned.
- 4.6. In addition to the briefing events set out above, other channels continue to be promoted to support development, including workbooks (from the LGA) and e-learning (e.g. Committee Chairing skills for new Chairs).
- 4.7. For new councillors it is our intention to undertake a three month review. This will provide new councillors to have an opportunity to feedback on their experiences over the last three months and to identify any training/development needs which have arisen.
- 4.8. Councillors will be reminded of the training and development opportunities via the Councillor Bulletin, the Councillors' Toolkit and direct emails/diary invites. All materials will continue to be made available on the Councillors' Toolkit. Councillors will be regularly updated on what is available in print and on-line and will also be signposted to relevant external training events.

5. Charter Status

- 5.1. A proposal to apply for LGA Member Development Charter Status will be put before the Audit and Governance Committee in July 2022 (as the responsible committee). The aim will be to make the application and achieve this status during the municipal year 2022/23.
- 5.2. The Councillor Development Charter exists to:
- Encourage councils to develop an effective strategy or approach to councillor development
 - Recognise those councils that have developed an effective approach
 - Encourage councils to continue that development and share their experiences and learning.
- 5.3. There are three essential criteria to achieving the Charter:
- There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support
 - The council has a strategic approach to councillor development

- Learning and development is effective in building councillors' skills and knowledge.
- 5.4. Following discussion with Bristol City Council officers, who have recently gained Charter Status, we can expect to be ready to make an application for chartered status within a year. They highlighted the value of a Councillor Development Steering group as a key driver for the project.
 - 5.5. The establishment of a steering group at Plymouth City Council will enable cross-party representation from across political groups. The initial task will be to make an assessment of our current provision (via the self-assessment matrix) and begin development of a Member Development Strategy.
 - 5.6. As a first step councils are asked to commit to the Charter, to make a commitment to develop the necessary strategy and processes to support effective councillor development. Once achieved the Charter is held for three years during which time the council can use the charter logo. At the end of this period there is a reassessment to ensure the council is still at least meeting the Charter requirements.
 - 5.7. The proposal to seek Member Development Chartered Status was supported by the Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Panel at their meeting held on the 29 June 2022.

Appendix B – LGA Member Development Charter

Appendix C – LGA Member Development Charter Self-Assessment Matrix