

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Councillor Training and Development

20 February 2025

Report of Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections

PURPOSE OF REPORT

For the Committee to review the current arrangements for requesting training or conferences which require funding and to consider whether an annual strategy or policy document for Councillor Training and Development should be re-introduced.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Committee notes the current arrangements for requesting funding for training or conferences, set out in paragraph 1.1 below, which were last reviewed in 2019.**
- (2) The Committee is asked to**
 - (a) Review the arrangements in light of information in this report;**
 - (b) Consider whether an annual strategy or policy document for Councillor Training and Development should be re-introduced and, if so, what format that might take.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 During the recent LGA Peer Review, Member Development was identified as an area for action, to “Invest further in member development to support Councillors (particularly new members) in their Council and community leadership roles.” A number of actions have been agreed to support improvement in this area. In the Member Satisfaction survey last year the following topics were identified for training: Community Leadership, Questioning, Negotiating and Chairing skills as well as IT. Those areas will be prioritised over the coming months, as well as providing diversity training, which was specifically requested some time ago. Finding a provider for the diversity content requested has proved challenging, however Democratic Support hope be able to arrange a session in the next couple of months. Members have already been invited to drop into a laptop training day at Lancaster Town Hall on 19th March 2025.

1.2 As part of the overall review of Member Development, the Committee is asked to look again at the criteria for accessing funding for courses and consider whether an overarching strategy is required going forward.

2.0 Current Arrangements – Requesting Funding for Training and Development

2.1 The current arrangements for accessing funding for training and development were agreed by this committee in October 2019. These are as follows:

- i. There are two tier levels of amounts that can be spent on events (depending on role) of up to £500 for Chairs of Committees or Cabinet members, and up to £300 for all other Members;
- ii. A Training Request form (**Appendix A**) has to be filled in by any Councillor wishing to attend a course/event/conference, and their application has to be forwarded via their group leader (if they have one) to Democratic Support;
- iii. After a Councillor has been to their event, they should complete an evaluation form (**Appendix B**) to say what benefits to the Council / taxpayers have been achieved by their attendance at the course / conference.

2.0 Current Arrangements – Councillor Training and Development Strategy

2.1 The City Council used to produce a Member Development Strategy which was refreshed every year. As Members are aware, the terms of reference for this Committee include “to manage issues relating to Councillors, including monitoring training and development undertaken”. As such the Strategy was developed and endorsed by this Committee each year.

2.2 The Strategy had been a necessary part of a process followed in 2008 to apply for the North West Employers’ (NWE) Member Development Charter. Details of the Charter can be found on this link: [North West Charter for Elected Member Development - NW Employers](#) Leading up to the award a small group of Councillors on this Committee, who were all very committed to getting the Charter award for the Council and keeping it, worked hard to fulfil the requirements for the award. They each championed Member Development with their political groups to keep attendance at training events as high as possible. At that point, political groups always appointed their group administrators to sit on this Committee in. That custom no longer seems to be in place. Groups now appoint any member(s) they choose.

2.3 The core group of Councillors who had championed Member Development retired one by one over the years and the strength of the lead on Member Development diminished through a number of factors; the focus on making savings and cuts in Member Development budget, lower attendance at training and reduction in staffing in Democratic Support being some of those factors. The number of meetings of this Committee was halved from six to three per year following the 2015 elections, too.

2.4 The last strategy to come to this Committee was for 2014/15. This is available to view in the Council’s online agenda/minutes [Agenda for Council Business Committee on Thursday, 26th June 2014, 6.00 p.m.](#)

2.5 In summary, the City Council no longer has a strategic document in place for Member Development.

3.0 Consultation with Councillors

3.1 On 27 November 2024, the Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections emailed all Councillors to consult on the arrangements for accessing funding. Only one

response was received to the email, from Councillor Maddocks. The lack of response could be for a variety of reasons. It could indicate that Councillors are happy with the current arrangements and have nothing to add, or perhaps that this topic is not at the forefront of their priorities at this time. It could be that Councillors have fed their views, via their groups, to the Members of this committee to put forward at the meeting.

- 3.2 The response which was received suggested that a Councillor Development Policy, with aims and objectives connected to the Council Plan be developed and adopted.

4.0 Options for Consideration - Requesting Funding for Training and Development

- 4.1 The Committee may set any parameters it chooses regarding accessing funding, from the very loosest 'first come, first served' approach, to a cap on amounts and a procedure for applying, similar to the current arrangements. A simple rule that no member should be able to receive more than a set % of the year's total budget could also be put in place. There are many options which could be put forward. The Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections will be in attendance at the meeting to discuss practical application of any proposals which are suggested.

- 4.2 For information, the amount Council agreed in the budget for Member Development for 2024/25 was £6,500, which is more than adequate since very few requests for to access the training budget are made. As the Committee will be aware, Democratic Support often offer free to attend, or low cost training courses provided by NWE, the Local Government Association and other providers. These are largely virtual or remote training events on Teams or Zoom. As Members sign up for these free courses themselves, Democratic Support do not always have numbers for take-up of these courses although it should be noted that even though the courses are free or very low cost to attend, many do state that they will still charge a fee for Councillors registering who fail to attend, unless they cancel their place in advance. Democratic Support are aware that last September several Councillors registered for a short Media Training course provided by NWE but failed to attend, which is concerning. The Council paid £495 for nine Councillors to attend (£55 per place) but understand that only four did attend.

5.0 Options for Consideration – Councillor Training and Development Strategy

- 5.1 The Committee is asked whether it would like to develop a policy or strategy for Councillor Training and Development, similar to the one suggested by Councillor Maddocks and the Member Development Strategy which was produced from 2008-2015. Officers could share documents from other Councils with the Committee to allow you, as Councillors, to develop your own training strategy over email, to ensure that it is entirely Member-led, in line with best practice and the NWE Charter. This will entail some work for Committee Members over email outside the meeting. If a draft can be produced that could be brought to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration. Any such strategy could be for 2025/26 or until May 2027 when the next elections are scheduled.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to discuss and make decisions regarding
- the arrangements for requesting funding for training and conferences; and
 - whether the Committee wishes to develop a policy or strategy for Councillor Training linked to the Council Plan.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Councillor Training will be met from within the existing budgets.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces

None identified.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no comment.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comment.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact Officer: Debbie Chambers
Telephone: 01524 582057
Email: dchambers@lancaster.gov.uk