

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

4 JANUARY 2007

**REPORT OF
CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

COUNCIL DECISION

Corporate-Lead Cabinet Member-Councillor Coleman

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR MEMBERS

1. Summary

To update members on issues related to the revision of the Council's Learning and Development Strategy for Members (LDSM), with a view to recommending approval of the strategy to Council in January 2007.

2. Recommendations

1. That the update provided regarding proposed revisions to the Council's Learning and Development Strategy for Members be noted.
2. The proposed Learning and Development Strategy for Members, incorporating the suggested revisions made at paragraph 3 of the report and the Guide to Members Roles, be approved.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

Cabinet, at its meeting held on the 13th July 2006, agreed to sign up to the North East Charter for Elected Member Development. The Council's Learning and Development Strategy has since been reviewed and refreshed in accordance with the criteria of the IDeA and regions Charter and has been the subject of consultation with the Members Advisory Panel. The revised strategy is submitted for approval by Council.

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting is being held, whilst the matter is being considered; not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc.; whether or not they are a member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting, and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room during consideration of the relevant item.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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2. The proposed Learning and Development Strategy for Members, incorporating the suggested revisions made at paragraph 3 of the report and the Guide to Members Roles, be approved.

BACKGROUND

1. Cabinet, at its meeting held on the 13th July 2006 agreed the need to review and refresh its Learning and Development Strategy for Members and to align this review in accordance with best practice by working towards the aims and objectives of the IDeA and the Regions and signing up to the North East Charter for Member Development. The Members Advisory Panel was charged with the responsibility for carrying out such a review.
2. At the last meeting of the Panel on the 13th December 2006, the Panel considered the proposed revision of the Council's Learning and Development Strategy for Members (LDSM) in terms of specific proposals submitted with regard to:-
 - The Vision, Aim and Objectives of the Strategy
 - Roles and responsibilities;
 - Induction Programme for new members post elections 2007;
 - Proposed approach to Personal Support Planning for all Members;
 - Content of Proposed Member Learning and Development Programme.
 - Information Service

3. With regard to the above, members made specific requests for further information or clarification of the following matters:-
- (i) clarification of Member Learning and Development Champion;
 - (ii) review of the proposed timetable for the new Members Induction Programme;
 - (iii) possible sanctions regarding those members that failed to undertake or complete mandatory training required as part of their Councillor role; eg in order to act as a member of the Planning or Licensing Committees; or serve on the Employee Appeals Panel;
 - (iv) how the Members Advisory Panel should recognise the emphasis placed within the proposed strategy on providing continuous member learning and development opportunities in order for members to build up their capacity;
 - (v) copies of the Guide to Members Roles to be made available to each member of the Members Advisory Panel for information.

DETAIL

4. The following information is therefore presented to members with regard to addressing each of the above queries raised:-

- (i) Clarification of Member Learning and Development Champion

Included within the roles and responsibilities of the portfolio of the Deputy Leader, agreed by Council is the responsibility for Members' training and development and Members' services support, along with Council, Cabinet and Committee processes; electoral registration and elections and democratic engagement/renewal. Therefore, it is proposed that the Learning and Development Strategy for Members incorporate recognition throughout of the role of the Deputy Leader of the Council as the Member Learning and Development Champion; and that all reference to the Chair of this Panel fulfilling such duties be amended. It is recognised however that the future composition of the Members Advisory Panel should always seek to include the Deputy Leader as the relevant Cabinet Member.

- (ii) Review of the proposed timetable for the new Members Induction Programme;

Following the Members Advisory Panel's suggestion, all members of the Council newly elected in May 2005, or in the time since, have been invited to consider the proposed Induction Programme for newly elected members (or those members wishing to refresh their understanding). Overall, members preferred that the initial induction and introduction to the organisation be held over four days, with walkabout sessions planned for the afternoons of days two, three and four. In supporting the proposed content of the Programme, members also requested that the following information be provided as part of the Induction:-

- Introduction to Role of School Governors;
- Emphasis within the Council Procedure Rules to the facility for members to request named votes at meetings;
- Summary of the support provided to Members appointed by Council/Cabinet to serve on Outside Body organisations;

- Map of the Municipal Buildings;
- Hierarchical organisation chart for each service grouping, including contact information for those officers responsible for services in different geographical areas;
- Mandatory Recruitment and Selection training for members serving on Appointment Panels.

It is therefore proposed that the Member Induction Programme be amended accordingly to incorporate the above suggestions; as well as the following additional corporate information suggested by Service Groups:-

- Equality & Diversity
- Role of Councillor as Corporate Parent

A copy of the revised Member Induction Programme is included at page 21 of the attached Learning & Development Strategy at the attached **Annexe** and it is proposed that, in addition to alerting both new and existing members to the opportunity to attend any of the Induction sessions, presentations of each session be made available on CD Rom and stored electronically on the Council's Intranet Members Library, for those members unable to attend any part of the programme. The work programme and content for each of the Induction Sessions is currently being developed.

- (ii) Possible sanctions regarding those members that failed to undertake or complete mandatory training required as part of their Councillor role; eg in order to act as a member of the Planning or Licensing Committees; or serve on the Employee Appeals Panel;

Rule 6.3 of the Council Procedure Rules contained within the Council's Constitution, provides that:-

'In order to be eligible to sit as a representative on regulatory or quasi- judicial committees or panels established by the Council, Members must have received formal training in relevant procedures and law either within the preceding twelve months or within their first year of service on the regulatory or quasi-judicial committee or panel concerned and thereafter on an annual basis'.

Mention has also earlier been made to the inclusion of appropriate Recruitment and Selection training for those members invited to serve on officer appointment panels for Heads of Service positions and above; and it is proposed that this should also be a mandatory requirement of qualification.

Failure by any member to undertake the required regulatory or quasi judicial training will result in that member being disqualified from serving on the particular regulatory or quasi- judicial committees or panel concerned. Such training will be provided each year and where it is impracticable for members to undertake it, reasonable alternative sessions will be offered. It should be noted that it will be a requirement for members to undertake the whole training event; (eg not half of a full day session) and that members who would possibly wish to attend quasi-judicial or regulatory panels as substitute members, should also firstly ensure that they too undertake the required training. A record of the training provision delivered to members will be maintained by the Principal Development Officer for Member Development.

- (iv) Recognition of the emphasis placed within the proposed strategy on providing continuous member learning and development opportunities in order for members to build up their capacity;

The proposed vision of LDSM is that 'all elected Members are fully committed to Learning and Development, taking full advantage of and accessing support to learning and development opportunities that will assist them in their role(s) and help the Council deliver its corporate priorities'. This is reinforced by the objective to achieve full commitment to Member Development. Achievement of both of these aims will both contribute to building capacity and will be a key component of the assessment undertaken by the North East Regional Employers Organisation (NEREO) of this authority's commitment to working towards the North East Charter for Member Development, as agreed by Council on the 19th July 2006. To facilitate the Council's approach to member learning and development, the Democratic Services Unit have been successful in obtaining funding to the value of £9,600 from the Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government Capacity Building Fund for the purpose of carrying out Personal Support Plans for members. The funding will enable us to secure the services of Eleanor Hayward and colleagues from NEREO to work, on a one to one basis with each elected member between May and July 2007, for the purpose of conducting an assessment of each member's own individual support needs via a Personal Support Plan interview. The Members Advisory Panel, at its meeting held on the 13TH December 2006, recognised the emphasis placed within the strategy to providing continuous member learning and development opportunities and requested that Cabinet/Council do similarly endorse the strategy on this basis.

- (v) Copies of the Guide to Members Roles to be made available to each member of the Members Advisory Panel for information.

Reference has previously been made to the invitation extended to this authority by the North East Improvement Partnership, to develop a Guide to Members Roles for the region that adequately set out each conceivable role that Councillors may be required to undertake as part of their duties. The guide, electronic copies of which have now been provided to all members of the Council, examines each main role in detail and looks at how they contribute to the delivery of effective outcomes for the authority and the community. The aim of the guide is to also identify the key skills that Councillors use to carry out each required role.

The Guide has now been launched by the North East Improvement Partnership at an event held at the Riverside, Chester le Street on the 27th November 2006. It is therefore now available to each authority within the region, including our own, as an appropriate resource on which to develop Personal Support Planning for members on the basis that it can be reviewed and updated by each authority as appropriate to suit the authority's own needs and to adapt to any new priorities and changes in Government policy. The proposed Learning and Development Strategy contains an electronic link to the Guide; and hard copies will be available at the meeting for reference.

CONCLUSION

4. Subject to Members consideration of the above issues, the revised Learning and Development Strategy for Members (LDSM) is attached at **Annexe** for

consideration and approval, along with the Guide to Members Roles, with a view to recommending approval of the strategy to Council in January 2007.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. Funding to the value of £9,600 has been obtained from the Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government Capacity Building Fund for the purpose of carrying out Personal Support Plans for members. The current Members Training budget is set at £13,000.

Legal

There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

This Learning and Development Strategy is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

The proposed strategy seeks to improve civic renewal within the Liveability Partnership by introducing a revised strategy that will support members fully in building capacity and identify the key skills and support required for members to fulfil their various roles to the fullest.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

This report has been considered by the Members Advisory Panel; and has been the subject of consultation with the Standards Committee.

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Background Papers

Report to Cabinet-13th July 2006
Reports to Members Advisory Panel-26th June
2006; 2nd November 2006, 13th December
2006

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

N/A

Property

N/A