Item No. 6

ETHICS AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE   **11 MARCH 2013**

SUBJECT:	**MEMBER DEVELOPMENT REVIEW**
REPORT BY:	**DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES**
LEAD OFFICER:	**CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)**

1.   **Purpose of Report**

1.1   The Council is committed to developing its councillors to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to carry out their roles in the most effective manner. The member development programme is a key part of this process, and this report provides a summary of the current approach for members' consideration.

2.   Current Member Development Overview

2.1   A Member Development Strategy was adopted in 2011 and the Council also has a discrete member development budget in place. In liaison with members and fellow officers, responsibility for the Council's member development is held by Democratic Services. Previously Democratic Services has primarily received strategic direction from the Constitutional Review Group, which includes senior representatives from each of the Council's political groups. However, the changes made to the terms of reference of the Ethics and Engagement Committee give this committee a new responsibility for monitoring and providing input to councillor development.

2.2   Following previous agreement by the Constitutional Review Group, officers developed Personal Development Plan (PDP) templates (attached as **Appendix A**) specifically intended for the Council's elected members. PDPs provide an opportunity to review a councillor's skills and knowledge within their current role, and to provide a plan for future development based upon the councillor's individual needs and aims. These templates were passed to political group representatives for the PDPs to be completed by councillors with group leaders or another appropriate person. For any independent members, there is also scope for a PDP to be completed with officers if requested.

2.3   In common with prior attempts to introduce member PDPs, as previously trialled by Human Resources, there has been a somewhat muted response to completing and following-up on the plans. However, those undertaken by Democratic Services with new members proved useful in targeting resources towards areas of particular interest to these members over the past and coming year. The Committee may therefore wish to consider whether further work on PDPs is worth pursuing and if the current format is appropriate for member usage. In particular, consideration could be given to whether it is most appropriate for members

undertaking PDPs to do so within their political group structure, where available, or with officers from Democratic Services.

2.4 With regard to member development as a whole, during 2012/13 the focus has primarily been upon the integration of newly-elected members and improving the effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny function. As well as day-to-day support and training provided by officers, this has included providing relevant all-day training sessions for elected members. Feedback from the members who attended these events has been positive and will feed into future training provision. Other training sessions, in addition to workshops and consultations on areas of Council policy, have included:

- Council procedure rules for new members
- The new standards regime
- Equality and diversity
- Community Engagement
- Partnership Working
- Licensing
- Planning

3. Future Member Development Possibilities

3.1 The Council faces significant budget pressures in the coming years and it is more vital than ever that all expenditure is properly targeted and provides significant value for money. In particular, the following areas present choices and opportunities to change the operation and direction of member development, and members' views are therefore invited.

3.2 E-Learning Update

At the previous meeting of the Ethics and Engagement Committee, members noted that they were minded to redirect funding from online e-learning to forms of training which would benefit a greater number of councillors. Having regard to this, any funds saved from future subscriptions to the Learning Pool are currently intended for use in the delivery of in-person training events. This is likely to provide additional flexibility in years when the training budget is placed under particular pressure, as happened during 2012/13. Having regard to the committee's recommendation, the member development budget will no longer be used to fund e-learning. However, the e-learning service is now likely to be retained for councillors' use following a renegotiation of the broader service contract.

3.3 2013/14 Training

Building upon feedback from members and officers, the training areas likely to form a focus for 2013/14 include chairing skills and improving the quality of members' participation in meetings. This will be in addition to the annual training provided for members taking part in regulatory committees. There is also relative freedom in the coming year, partly as no councillor terms of office are scheduled to end in May 2013, for members to offer views on any other areas perceived to be a priority for training or development. As referenced in para 3.10, members may wish to offer feedback at the meeting of the Committee as well as offering views on the future mechanisms for guiding the member development programme.

3.4   Member Inductions
        The member induction programme has been continually developed in recent
        years to improve the information and guidance provided to new members. The
        elections of May 2012 returned eight new councillors, the majority of whom did
        not have previous direct experience of local government. While feedback received
        from members has been positive, it is clear that this represented a particular
        challenge to the current system for providing inductions and established a number
        of points which will be addressed in future.

3.5   It is probably inevitable when electing by thirds that it is more difficult to focus
        resources on providing effective member inductions, as the inductions of new
        councillors take place three times as often as in other local authorities, with
        considerable variation in the number elected each year. However, a number of
        ideas are under consideration to improve provision in this area, including a
        particular focus on improving the quality and quantity of information regarding the
        role of a councillor as well as a plan for the induction process to all prospective
        electoral candidates. There also remains scope for political groups to provide a
        formal councillor 'buddying' system whereby councillors are assigned a contact
        within their political group as a point of contact for advice and assistance.

3.6   Public Attendance Records
        In order for training to be fully effective, it should reach as high a proportion of its
        target audience as possible. While it is recognised that councillors have significant
        demands upon their time, both in an official and personal capacity, attendance at
        training forms an important part of member development.

3.7   Democratic Services currently maintain an informal attendance record for training
        events which is provided to political groups' training representatives at regular
        intervals. Making use of the Council's online committee system, it will be possible
        to make training attendance information public. This would give members of the
        public the opportunity to see some of the particular skills and qualities their
        elected representatives have been developing as part of their role. In order to
        emphasise the positive aspects of member development, members may consider
        it more appropriate to provide details of the training and development which has
        been undertaken, rather than a list also including any missed events or
        opportunities.

3.8   Changing the Form of Training
        At the last meeting of the Committee, members expressed views regarding the
        perceived professionalisation of the role of the councillor and the increased
        emphasis placed on training and development. Members are understandably
        keen to ensure that training remains appropriate both to the needs and capacities
        of councillors. In some areas, such as training relating to regulatory training for
        the Licensing and Planning Committees, the Council has a clear obligation to
        ensure members are made aware of the grounds on which their decision must be
        based. A failure to ensure decisions are being taken within the legal framework is
        likely to lead to poor decision making as well as a significant risk of challenge
        entailing both reputational and financial damage to the Council. As a result of the
        special nature of these particular areas, training for members continues to be
        provided on an annual basis.

3.9   However, there remains scope both to affect the manner in which this training is delivered, as well as the broader and more discretionary member development opportunities provided for councillors. Members are therefore invited to provide views on the relative merits of current forms of training. In particular, members may wish to consider the current focus on providing regular short evening training sessions, as against the possibility of less regular and more diverse all-day development sessions.

3.10   <u>Shaping Future Member Development</u>
There is a danger with an overly officer-led programme that member development becomes something that councillors primarily regard as being done to them rather than a plan to be actively contributed to and benefitted from. Successful member development has to be based around both the Council's priorities as a whole and the individual characteristics of our members. With this in mind, there is value in considering the manner in which councillors are able to contribute towards forming the member development programme. If widely utilised PDPs form one clear channel for gathering members' views on future training. Further possible ideas the Committee may wish to consider include:
- Receiving more regular updates on member development and offering feedback during future meetings of the Committee.
- Forming a regular working group to discuss member development with the appropriate officers.
- Opening the choice of some training topics each year to a general all-member vote in order to select matters of the greatest interest to councillors.

4.   Strategic Priorities

4.1   Councillors have a critical role to play in ensuring a fit for purpose council, and their performance is affected by the skills and knowledge which they are able to apply in forming policy and making decisions. Member development acts as adjunct to supplement and hone the qualities which members bring from their everyday lives by providing opportunities to develop skills and knowledge relevant to local government.

5.   Finance Implications

5.1   Any suggested changes to the delivery of or support for member development must be funded from within its existing budget.

6.   Legal Implications

6.1   There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.   Recommendations

7.1   That members consider and offer comments on the current provision of member development and plans for its future delivery, particularly including the following topics:

- The position of personal development plans
- The publication of training attendance records
- The future contribution of the committee and members towards member development planning
- Feedback on the priorities for specific training in the new municipal year.