Member Development Steering Group   **1 December 2011**

Report of the Assistant Director, Governance & ICT

Member Training & Development Policy

Summary

1. The report reviews the Member Training & Development Policy (MT&DP)and suggests appropriate revisions which Members may wish to take on board as part of the annual review of the Policy.

Background

2. At Council in January 2009, all Members agreed the current policy document which guides the provision of training and development to Members and how Members are expected to engage with it.

3. This Steering Group is responsible for the coordination of all training and development activity to Members and, as such, is committed, together with its parent Committee (currently Standards Committee), to review the Policy on an annual basis. An annual review helps to keep the Policy current and relevant. Ensuring the Policy remains viable over the next 2 years will be key to continuing to deliver effective training and learning for Members. This, in turn, will be how the Council will be judged when it our Member Development Charter status is reviewed in 2 years time by the Local Government Group.

4. Following this year's District Elections, all Members (newly elected and returning) received their 'Guide to Being a York Councillor'. Section 4 of the 'Guide' is dedicated to information for Members about developing their skills, including the current Policy document. A copy of the Policy is attached at Annex A to this report, for convenience.

What Needs Reviewing

5.   **Steering Group Policy Statement**
     As part of its work in securing a corporate commitment to training and development for Members, the Steering Group produced a policy statement, in support of the Policy document, which sets out why, organisationally, this Group is committed to having well trained Members

6.   Members of this Steering Group may wish to review the statement it made last year for currency. It can be found at the front of the attached Policy.

7.   **Being Corporate**
     The Council now has a revised Council Plan 2011-15, which sets out its key priorities for the next 4 years. These are to:

     - Create jobs/grow the economy
     - Get York moving
     - Build strong communities
     - Protect vulnerable people
     - Protect the environment

     The relevant section in the Member Development & Training Policy will need updating to reflect the new Council Plan. Some new wording has been suggested in the appropriate section of the policy attached.

8.   **Aims of the Policy**
     Members may wish to review these to ensure the aims reflect current and ongoing need.

9.   **Role of Member Development Steering Group**
     Members may again wish to review what the Policy stipulates the role of this Steering Group is in relation to the delivery of member training and development.

10. **Budget**
     The Policy currently states (page 9) that 'expenses incurred by Members attending development activities will be reimbursed under the Members Allowances Scheme'. However, the Scheme of Allowances to Members will be reviewed by an Independent Remuneration Panel in January 2012, when it meets to review allowances paid and expenses/entitlements provided to Members.

It may be that that reference will need amending in the light of that review.

11. **Protocol on External Conferences**
Last year, this Steering Group introduced a protocol to better manage the organisation and costs of Members wanting to attend external conferences, in addition to undertaking activities and learning in the annual core programme. The protocol currently provides an opportunity for each Member to attend one external conference per year, on the basis that funding is split 50-50 between Democratic Services and the relevant services directorate.

12. In an effort to provide guidance and clarity to Members on what type of conferences they might find it beneficial to attend, a list of 'recommended' Conferences was put together (in consultation with Service Directorates) and included in the Policy. To date, 8 Members have taken up the opportunity to attend external conferences in the current year.

13. Despite the protocol, attendance at external conferences is still proving quite difficult to manage. Some of the ongoing issues raised are:

   o Some conferences are free with minimal if any travel/accommodation costs;
   o Some conferences are free but involve relatively expensive travel/accommodation
   o Some Members don't want to go to any extra training outside the core programme at all
   o Some Members (eg Cabinet Members or Chairs of high profile Committees) have a greater need to attend external training activity

    Whilst the current protocol attempts to manage the situation, it is proving to be rather too restrictive, in that, it:

   • Restricts opportunities for those Members perhaps most in need;
   • Takes no account of relative travel costs, nor of whether the event is charged or free; and
   • Provides opportunities for all, when the majority are not required

14.   Members are asked to consider whether they wish to review this Protocol, as part of the Policy, and perhaps consider providing each Group with a potential sum to spend on external conferences from within the overall Member Development Budget. If the Steering Group was minded to review the protocol along these lines, then, it is suggested that some criteria ought to be provided to the groups setting out guidelines on what the funds should be allocated to. Any such criteria and a revised protocol for attendance at external training activities could be brought back to the next meeting of the Steering Group.

15.   As part of this review, it is suggested, also, that the list of Annual Conferences be reviewed, in conjunction with Services Directorates for 2012/13.

16.   **Monitoring & Evaluation**
When the Localism Bill is enacted, it is understood that Standards Committees may not exist in their present format up and down the country. As a result, the arrangements for this Steering Group to report to Standards Committee may disappear. It is suggested that it would therefore be appropriate for the Steering Group to report to the Cabinet instead, on a cyclical basis. If this is agreed, the monitoring/evaluation reporting cycle would need updating in the Policy.

17.   **General**
The existing Policy refers to the Executive in places and these references will need to be updated and changed to reflect the new title of Cabinet given to that body by the new ruling Administration, upon the formation of the new Council in May this year.

Consultation

18.   This Steering Group is the Member consultative body on Member training and development related issues. Any revisions made to the Policy will need to be communicated widely to all Members. Once the future of the Standards Committee is known, a decision will need to be made as to whether the revised Policy is reported to Cabinet for endorsement.

Options

19.   (a) to suggest and recommend appropriate revisions to the Member Training & Development Policy, including the existing protocol on attendance at external conferences;

(b) not to make any revisions to the current Policy, other than factual updates, such as the changes to the Council Plan and Cabinet references.

Council Plan 2011-15

20. Having a Member Training & Development Policy demonstrates the Council's commitment to well trained and knowledgeable Members, in turn, making decisions relating to the new key priorities set out in the Council Plan.

Implications

21. There are no direct implications associated with the recommendations in this report. Clearly, there are financial and human resources implications which arise from any core training programme and opportunities provided by the Council to its Members, as a result of having a Member Training & Development Policy.

Risk Management

22. If Members do not review the existing Policy, there is a risk that the Policy will become tired and will not be responsive to the ever-changing training and development needs of Members, as their roles grow and legislative changes emerge.

Recommendation

23. Members are asked to consider what revisions to the Member Training & Development Policy they would like, in the light of the issues identified in paragraphs 5-17 of this report.

Reason

24. To enable the Policy to remain relevant and flexible enough to serve the best interests of providing well trained elected Members.

Contact Details

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Report Approved | √ | **Date** 24 November 2011

Specialist Implications Officer(s)
None

Wards Affected: | **All** | √

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None.

Annexes:

Annex A – Member Development & Training Policy – To follow.