



People, Performance and Development Committee
14 June 2018

Member/Officer Working Relationships

Purpose of the report:

To update Members on the initiatives undertaken by the Council to foster effective working relationships between Members and officers.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the People, Performance and Development Committee:

- i. confirms its supports for the initiatives outlined in the report, which are designed to foster effective working relationships between Members and officers.
- ii. recognises the areas for improvements outlined in the report and endorses the next steps suggested to further strengthen Member/Officer working.
- iii. commissions the Member Development Steering Group to lead a review of the Member/Officer protocol.

Introduction:

1. Members and officers are indispensable to one another and mutual respect and communication between both is essential for good local government.
2. Members provide a democratic mandate to the Council, whereas officers contribute the professional and managerial expertise to deliver the policies agreed by Members.
3. It is these differing perspectives that can mean the Member/officer working relationship is not as effective as it might be and, on occasion,

conflict can occur (see annex 1). That is why it is important to have guidelines and training in place to support effective Member/Officer working.

The Existing Offer:

4. A number of staff in Democratic Services hold formal qualifications as trainers and the service currently provides a comprehensive training offer to staff regarding working with Members. The training offer includes:

4.1 **Understanding the Political Processes of the Council** – this is an e-learning course suitable for all officers, particularly new starters. It provides staff with a basic understanding of the political structure of the Council and its Constitution, alongside an awareness of the different roles of Members and officers.

4.2 **All You Need to Know about Elected Members** – this half day classroom training course is suitable for all officers – particularly those who are likely to come into contact with Members. It provides staff with an understanding of the Member/Officer protocol and techniques for working effectively with Members, alongside guidance for navigating the decision making process and taking a report to a committee or Cabinet. Democratic Services runs this course approximately four times a year.

4.3 **Leading in a Political Environment Programme** – this innovative six month training programme is aimed at Senior Managers. The programme aims to provide officers with:

- **Knowledge** of how to work with the ‘political machinery’ of the Council – e.g. taking a decision through Cabinet, writing reports, responding to Select Committee questions/recommendations, preparing for Council questions etc.
- **Skills** to operate effectively in a political environment –e.g. how to read people and situations, build alignments, anticipate reactions and use interpersonal skills effectively.
- **Experience** of attending meetings and interacting with Members, providing officers with confidence and expertise for the future.

The programme is self-directing, meaning that participants complete course activities in their own time. There are three catch-ups and one classroom training session with Democratic Services officers throughout the course of the programme. The programme runs twice a year, with approximately ten Senior Managers attending each cohort. Although Democratic Services runs the training programme, experienced senior officers from throughout the organisation are involved as mentors, offering their advice and expertise to the programme participants on how to work effectively in a political environment.

4.4 Tailored training for teams – Democratic Services offers tailored training sessions for teams upon request or where there is an identified need. For example, recent tailored sessions include report writing training for officers in Procurement and Environment and Infrastructure.

4.5 Member Shadowing – Democratic Services arrange for officers to shadow Members to gain a greater understanding of their roles. Member shadowing is a requirement of the Leading in a Political Environment programme but is also arranged for other officers on an ad-hoc basis.

Strengths of Current Offer

- 5. Democratic Services offers a comprehensive training offer to staff regarding working with Members. The offer forms part of the overall training catalogue that is made available to all staff through the My Learning section of the s-net portal. Feedback is sought on a regular basis, with the vast majority of participants rating our courses as ‘very good.’
- 6. The Leading in a Political Environment programme is particularly strong, with Surrey thought to be the only Council in the country to offer this training internally. Where councils offer similar training, most procure it externally, often at significant expense, whereas SCC has found a low-cost and effective in house-solution. Feedback for this programme is excellent and it is often over-subscribed as a result.

Weaknesses of Current Offer

- 7. Participation in the current training offer is self-selecting (i.e. generally participants identify the need for and book onto the training themselves) and only reaches a small proportion of staff. While officers are encouraged to take actions from the learning for their teams and services as well as themselves as individuals, there is a need to explore options for increasing awareness and participation in the training offer to ensure further reach, for example, by making the e-learning course mandatory for new starters.
- 8. Although there is a wide training offer for officers on working with Members, there is currently no reciprocal training to advise Members on how to work effectively with officers. Such training is widely available externally, though, and Democratic Services could develop a tailored course to be delivered to Members in-house. This would prove to be a more cost-effective solution.

The Member/Officer Protocol

- 9. Any training that Democratic Services provides to Members or officers on effective working relationships focuses on the [Member/Officer Protocol](#).

The Protocol sets guidelines for how Members/officers should best work together and forms part of the Constitution.

10. However, the Protocol has not been reviewed for a number of years and is not actively promoted to either officers or Members. It has become clear that there is a need to increase awareness of the Protocol, if it is to be effective in guiding and promoting effective Member/Officer working relationships.
11. Prompted by consideration of the improvement of Member/Officer working relationships, the cross party Member Development Steering Group, chaired by Cllr Tim Oliver, have offered to review the Protocol on behalf of the council. This review would include engagement with Members and officers alike to ensure that the Member/Officer Protocol is fit for purpose, as well as looking at ways to better communicate the Protocol to ensure that it is a useful working document.
12. Once the review is complete, the refreshed Member/Officer Protocol would be submitted for approval to Full Council, as it forms part of the Constitution.

Conclusions:

13. Effective Member/Officer working relationships are essential to good local government. This council has a comprehensive development offer available for officers on working with elected Members but there is a need to explore options for increasing awareness of, and participation in, the training. There is currently no reciprocal training available for Members regarding working with officers and the Member/Officer Protocol, which should underpin all training, requires revision.
14. Based on these conclusions, the following next steps are recommended:
 - 14.1 That the Member Development Steering Group leads a review of the Member/Officer Protocol, ensuring that it is fit for purpose and actively communicated.
 - 14.2 That Democratic Services explores options for increasing awareness and participation in the training offer available to officers regarding working with Members.
 - 14.3 That an in-house training solution is developed to support Members to work effectively with officers.

Financial and value for money implications

15. The proposed actions can be undertaken by the Democratic Services team within existing resources. A small investment of time and resources in supporting effective working relationships between Members and officers is deemed appropriate given the impact these can have on good governance.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

16. None.

Risk Management Implications

17. Effective Member/Officer relationships support good decision making and thus reduce the risks associated with poor governance.

Next steps

18. If approved by the People, Performance and Development Committee, the review of the Member/Officer Protocol (and other associated actions) will commence in July 2018.

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Sources/background papers:

- [Member/Officer Protocol](#)

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