

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL: ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

1 INTRODUCTION

Elected Members have a vital role in establishing and maintaining the strategic direction of Surrey County Council. They support the Council, by acting as Community Leaders, to embed our values and achieve our corporate priorities.

To support Members in their role we adopt a flexible approach to learning and development, which meets collective and individual development needs over the term of the council, taking into account each elected Member's individual learning style.

The purpose of this document is to set out the County Council's approach to Member development and how the approach is to be achieved.

This strategy was originally approved in June 2007, and revised in March 2011, when the County Council made a commitment to reviewing it every other year. It will form an important part of the council's submission for Elected Member Development Charter Plus status through South East Employers.

The aim of this elected Member Development Strategy is to provide Members with an outline of development activities open to them, which will support them in their role as a County Councillor throughout their term of office.

2 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP

The Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) plays a crucial role in the achievement of this strategy and was instrumental in helping the authority to achieve the Elected Member Development Charter in October 2011. The group is Member led, and includes Members from all of the county council's political groups. It is supported by the Senior Manager, Cabinet and Member Support in Democratic Services, who can provide guidance on learning and development. The Assistant Chief Executive also attends the MDSG meetings. While the officers are responsible for the administration of member development, the Steering Group ensures that the proposed programme of activities meets Members' needs and that events are scheduled and commissioned appropriately and effectively.

The terms of reference of the Steering Group are as follows:

1. To be champions for, and promote the development of, Members.
2. To keep the Members' Development Strategy relevant and up to date.
3. To take a leading role in helping the authority to achieve the Elected Member Development Charter Plus status.
4. To review and consider training and development needs with a view to producing comprehensive induction and ongoing training and development programmes.

The membership of the group is currently:
Denise Le Gal, Cabinet Member for Change and Efficiency, including portfolio responsibility for member development; Steve Cosser, Lynne Hack, John Orrick, Michael Sydney and Chris Townsend.

3 IDENTIFYING MEMBER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

A variety of approaches have been piloted to identify specific individual learning and development needs. A priority for the MDSG in the next term of the county council will be to consider an approach to analysing Members' needs and embedding a training needs analysis/personal development plan process.

The responsibility for identifying learning and development needs rests with individual Members. In turn, the corporate centre and services should be well placed to identify needs and provide appropriate and timely training arising from, for example, the introduction of new legislation and corporate governance issues.

Members who wish to sit on certain committees must have undertaken the relevant training beforehand to ensure they are compliant with the legislation.

Democratic Services keep a record of all the learning and development activities attended by each Member. The responsibility for maintaining this record lies with the Senior Manager, Cabinet and Member Support.

4 ANNUAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The MDSG has agreed a Learning and Development Programme for each Council year. The programme is designed to encompass:

- Development requirements identified through the PDP process
- Development activities to reflect the council's agreed corporate objectives
- Development needs arising from external factors, such as legislative or other changes affecting local government and its functions
- Suggestions from Members and officers.

At least one day a month is specified as a 'Member Development Day' and these dates are published in the calendar. Wherever possible, these dates will be used for training and development events and efforts will be made to avoid scheduling other Member meetings at the same time. As far as possible the timings of learning and development activities is planned in line with Member preferences, as expressed in the Member Survey, which are carried out every other year.

Administrative support for member development will be provided by Democratic Services. This includes co-ordination of the programme, promotion of the learning and development events, maintaining records and administering the budget. Information about learning and development events in each forthcoming three month period will be published in a monthly poster for Members, with the aim of allowing good notice to be given. Sufficient information about the content and planned outcomes will be advertised to enable Members to assess whether they need to attend.

The agreed Learning and Development Programme for the four-year term of the council is attached at Appendix A. The development activities outlined in the programme are designed to be flexible and appropriate and delivered as a programme of events that Members can tap into as required. The training activities that all elected Members are expected to undertake are:

- Member induction
- Equalities and Diversity Awareness
- Code of Conduct training
- Committee relevant training e.g. planning legislation, induction sessions
- Role-specific training prior to commencing certain roles, eg chairing skills
- Scrutiny
- Corporate Parenting.

5 MEETING MEMBER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Currently, a variety of approaches is taken to meeting Members' collective and individual development needs. Members of the Council carry out a wide range of roles, including Cabinet portfolio holder; Chairman or Vice Chairman; Members of select committees, local committees, regulatory committees; representational roles on behalf of the Council; and community leadership. In addition they need to keep up to date with the over-arching strategic challenges facing the County Council and corporate initiatives to deliver the Corporate Plan.

The paragraphs below set out the opportunities available to respond to each particular development need:

Role specific training: The County Council has agreed role descriptions for the following specific positions:

- the Leader of the Council
- Deputy Leader of the Council
- Chairman of the County Council
- Vice-Chairman of the County Council
- Cabinet Member
- Chairman of a Select Committee
- Vice-Chairman of a Select Committee
- Chairman of Planning and Regulatory Committee
- Vice-Chairman of Planning and Regulatory Committee
- Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee
- Vice-Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee
- Chairman of a Local Committee
- Vice-Chairman of a Local Committee
- Group Spokesperson of Opposition Group

Role specific skills and knowledge delivered through officer support, to committees such as Planning & Regulatory Committee and select committees, will ensure that Members' needs are met. Officers and Members will continue to identify ongoing development needs, especially for new Members and when changes in regulation or in local policy are introduced. Members new to the council following countywide elections will be offered the support of a more experienced officer 'buddy' to support them in their new role. In addition, mentoring systems may be used by each political group to support new Members.

Training on corporate initiatives and strategies: A different approach is required for the development associated with corporate/whole council initiatives that benefit all Members. Keeping Members informed and up to date is one of the essential outcomes for Member development. A programme of seminars is organised throughout the year to brief and engage Members on key issues. The subject of each seminar is determined either by Member request or by a service identifying a need due to changes in corporate initiatives, for example. The MDSG considers the seminar programme at each of its meetings. The dates for these seminars are set at the start of the council year and are printed in the county diary to ensure Members are able to attend.

Officers hosting these training events are encouraged to adopt an approach that enables a two-way dialogue on the council's priorities and the roles of Members within them. The Chief Executive's six monthly progress report presentation to Members is a good example of one such session.

Generic skills development: There continues to be a need for skills development and awareness training in respect of such topics as finance, information technology, time management etc. IT skills are particularly important in order to ensure that Members have the opportunity to play a full role in modern organisations and regular IT training will be offered to Members, for example, on file management, BlackBerry use, keyboard skills, Word and Lotus Notes, subject to demand. Other examples of IT training offered to Members include drop in sessions, while top tips documents have also been produced and published to provide support on key applications.

Induction: It is essential that new Members are provided with the opportunity to take on board knowledge and skills that they need for their roles within the council as soon as possible after their election. Member induction covers key corporate themes, initiatives and departmental overviews and introductions. This is followed by a series of key sessions spread across a number of months. New Members are also provided with a copy of the Local Government Improvement and Development's Councillors Guide. The guide has been designed as an introduction to their new roles, and as a refresher for sitting and returning Members.

The MDSG will consider the plans for induction in the autumn preceding the election and will prepare a draft programme for agreement in January of the election year. The Senior Manager, Cabinet and Member Support, will have responsibility for ensuring that the agreed programme is delivered.

Those elected to the County Council, including returning Members, will be provided with a 'Countyfile' containing information designed to support them in their role. The contents will be subject to a full review by the MDSG in the year leading up to an election.

An induction programme for Members who are elected at by-elections will also be established, as those Members do not have the benefit of the full programme that follows the scheduled elections.

Personal development: As well as group or generic training, learning and development opportunities that satisfy individual needs must also be offered. It is up to each individual to take responsibility for their own development – this in itself also implies some accountability for ensuring that Members are taking personal steps to ensure that they are appropriately skilled for their particular role. This anticipates a willingness to take part in learning opportunities that are designed to meet their development needs.

Members are encouraged to consider different approaches to their development, including: requesting a one to one with an appropriate officer, undertaking a site visit, discussing a

matter with a more experienced Member, carrying out some personal research or attending an external event. All Members should take on this responsibility and consider how they can meet their own needs, particularly in the light of their learning style preference.

Individual support: Where appropriate and where business needs allow, individual needs may be met on a 1:1 basis, for example, with computer skills or for Members with specific learning requirements.

All Members who are standing down at a scheduled election will be invited to complete an exit interview questionnaire in order to share their reflections on their term of office. An analysis of the responses to the exit interviews is shared with the Member Development Steering Group, to agree any corrective actions and suggestions.

Learning Styles: It is important to remember that people learn in different ways. Members can undertake the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles questionnaire, available on s::net, to identify their learning style and try to match that and their development need to a relevant programme. As no single approach will be suitable for all Members, a range of approaches is used. Some Members will want to get involved in practical approaches, for example site visits, while others will need the space to stand back and reflect on issues before forming a view.

Other development activities that can be sourced are mentoring, job shadowing, coaching and networking, both at internal and external events, as well as market stall events, reading and visits. Members are entitled to attend in-house courses advertised in the training catalogue on s::net. Organisations such as Local Government Improvement and Development include specific pages on councillor development on their website at www.idea.gov.uk

When planning events, consideration will be given to the need to accommodate the other commitments that Members have as far as possible. Alternative timings, such as early mornings, evenings and weekends will be considered when organising sessions, subject to Members' views.

Opportunities will be explored to improve accessibility to training activities, for example, through the use of e-learning, webcasting and distance learning opportunities.

Where possible, the council will seek to offer training and development opportunities with other local authorities and partner organisations and provide joint training activities where appropriate.

6 EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Information about events organised by accredited training organisations will be advertised in the Members' Resources Room at County Hall, and via the monthly Learning and Development poster, which is circulated to Members electronically and published on the Members' Portal. Occasionally, external events may be advertised direct to specific groups of Members, where it is logical to do so. The MDSG has approved a protocol for Members' attendance on external developmental events, linking requests to personal development and corporate priorities.

Attendance on any external learning and development event is subject to the prior agreement of the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of the MDSG.

Members are expected to share their learning from these events and training materials will be published on the Members' Portal so that all Members can benefit from the activity.

7 OTHER SUPPORT

Members' Portal

Members have a designated web-based area where they can access news and recent publications, corporate and community information about the county, including demographic information for each division, and useful links to other websites, maps and committee papers.

Dedicated resource area

Members need to be able to access the latest information quickly and easily both in hard copy and electronically. The Member Resources Room is stocked with key corporate documents, area information, consultation documents and training manuals. A networked PC, printer and photocopier are also provided in the room.

8 BUDGET FOR MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The central budget for Member learning and development sits within the overall Democratic Services budget. This will meet the cost of the annual learning and development programme and is managed by the Democratic Services Lead Manager. Some associated costs are met from other service budgets, including the cost of Members attending service-based conferences and occasional other events. The MDSG has agreed a protocol for Members' attendance at learning and development events funded from the learning and development budget, as attached at Appendix D. The MDSG will work with Finance officers to shape the budget for Members' Learning and Development budget, and will take a view on the prioritisation of budget spend according to corporate priorities and individual Member need.

9 EVALUATING MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The MDSG will establish processes for evaluating the effectiveness of member learning and development, including mechanisms to enable Members to give feedback on events in which they have participated. Evaluation will have the objective of making improvements in future provision and consequently producing increased benefits both to individual Members and the County Council. The process for evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of member learning and development is set out at Appendix C.

10 SOUTH EAST EMPLOYERS ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER PLUS

In order to achieve Charter Plus status, the county council will have to robustly demonstrate:

1. Commitment to councillor development, including evidence of Top political and managerial leadership commitment to development of elected members and a Councillor Learning and Development Policy

2. A strategic approach to councillor development, including evidence of Individual Learning and Development Plans
3. Evidence that learning and development is effective in building capacity, and that investment in learning and development is evaluated in terms of benefit and impact
4. Evidence that councillors are supported, for example, conducting business to allow for equality of access to the key political decision making processes.

The county has signed up to achieve Charter Plus status by April 2013. The authority was awarded Charter status in October 2011, which is valid for three years, until October 2014. Should the county council decide not to be assessed for Charter Plus status in 2013, it will need to undergo a mid-term assessment at that time to ensure that it continues to meet Charter standards.

11 STRATEGY REVIEW

The needs of Councillors will evolve over time and it is important that both individual needs and the overall Elected Member Development Strategy are reviewed regularly. This will provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of recent training events as well as identify any new requirements.

This Strategy will also be reviewed every other year. The MDSG will take the lead on reviewing the strategy and will recommend any proposed changes it considers necessary. The Strategy will be submitted to Council for approval.

Denise Le Gal
Cabinet Member for Change and Efficiency and Chairman of the Member Development Steering Group

March 2013

Next review due: March 2015 and every other year thereafter

Appendices:

Appendix A: Four year learning and development programme

Appendix B: Member roles including required skills/development

Appendix C: The process for evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of member learning and development

Appendix D: Protocol for Elected Member Attendance at External Courses and Conferences, and application form

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