



## OFFICER REPORT TO COUNCIL

### ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL – MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

#### **KEY ISSUE/DECISION:**

Members play an essential role in setting, and maintaining, the strategic direction of the Council. They also act as community leaders and provide an essential interface between the Council and Surrey residents.

It is therefore important that the Council invests in the development of its Members, to enable them to perform their roles as effectively as possible.

This report provides an annual overview of the Council's approach to Member development, so that Members can be assured that the current approach is sufficient, equitable and effective.

#### **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP:**

1. All Member development activity is monitored by the Member Development Steering Group (MDSG). The MDSG is cross-political and the current membership is Colin Kemp (Chairman), Chris Botten, Helyn Clack, Nick Darby, Robert Evans, John O'Reilly, Chris Townsend and Hazel Watson. Helyn Clack has taken on the role of Chairman whilst Colin Kemp has been temporarily away from some councillor duties.
2. The group meets informally, six times a year, to oversee the delivery of the Member Development Programme and other councillor support issues.

#### **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

3. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Member Development Programme moved online in May 2020. This has allowed regular development opportunities to continue throughout the last year and there has been high attendance across these sessions. For example, it is now commonplace to see over 50% of Members at a seminar – a much higher rate of attendance than when sessions were held in person.

4. In September 2020, Democratic Services published the results of its Member Agile Working Survey. Through the survey, Members fed back that the majority of Member development sessions should continue virtually beyond the pandemic, thus reducing the travel and time associated with attending training events.

### **MICROSOFT TEAMS TRAINING**

5. In order to facilitate remote meetings and move development sessions online, there was a need to provide all Members with MS Teams Training in April 2020. A user guide, video and online classroom training course was created, to enable Members of different ability levels to choose the support most suitable for them. All Members received a phone call from Democratic Services to ensure they had the right IT set up to work remotely. The training materials were well-received, with the classroom course rated 'good' or 'very good' by 100% of attendees.
6. Since April 2020, a number of MS Teams drop-in sessions have been offered to Members. Teams training will be an integral part of the new councillor induction, with sessions open to returning Members who want to refresh their skills.

### **MEMBER PORTAL**

7. In September 2020, Democratic Services refreshed the online Member Portal. Feedback suggested that the previous Member Portal was difficult to access and clunky to navigate. By transferring the Portal to Teams, Democratic Services have resolved these issues whilst also reducing the amount of officer time it takes to update the portal. Since September 2020, 'hits' on the Member Portal have been double what they were on the old site and increasing each month. We look forward to continuing to develop the Portal so that it becomes a one-stop shop for training videos, resources and support for Members.

### **EVALUATION AND MEMBER SURVEY**

8. Although the evaluation we receive for Member development is generally positive, it is often difficult to get representative samples of feedback from development sessions and training courses. We are working on making the online evaluation forms shorter and simpler for the new municipal year so that we can gather higher levels of feedback from sessions and ensure that the development programme is meeting Members' needs.
9. In March 2021, Democratic Services will launch an end-of-term Member survey. This survey will gather Members feedback on a variety of topics, including Member development, and will be used to shape how Democratic Services supports councillors going forward.

## **NEW CIVIC HEART**

10. The MDSG has played a key role in overseeing the development of the Member and democratic spaces at the new Civic Heart at Woodhatch Place. In November 2020, the group set up a Member Panel to review over 100 civic artefacts at County Hall and make recommendations regarding their future location. The recommendations, which have been agreed by the Leader, will see a number of items move to the Lodge at Woodhatch Place, whilst other items will be housed at the Surrey History Centre or loaned to local Surrey museums or galleries – enabling them to be viewed by the public.

## **ELECTIONS AND INDUCTION PROJECT**

11. Throughout 2021, the MDSG has been overseeing the delivering of the Council's Election and Induction 2021 project. This includes feeding into the plans for the induction and ensuring that the process is truly Member led.

12. On Thursday 25 February, the Council held a virtual Prospective Councillors event, to provide candidates with information about Surrey and what to expect if they are elected. The event was well attended with over eighty attending across the Teams meeting and viewing the webcast.

13. A key objective of the Elections/Induction project is to offer induction reviews to all councillors. This will enable Democratic Services to review how the induction is being received and what further support Members need. The MDSG will monitor the response to these reviews and any key themes arising from them.

## **CHARTER PLUS ACCREDITATION**

14. The Local Government Association (LGA) assesses the support and development that councils offer their Members through what is known as the 'Charter' scheme. In order to achieve Charter accreditation, councils have to prove that their Member development and support offer meets a required standard. Surrey County Council first became a Charter Council in 2011. In 2018, the Council was assessed as meeting the Charter Plus standard for Member development and support. Surrey is one of only a handful of councils in the country that has met this higher level of accreditation. Surrey's Charter Plus accreditation is due to be reviewed in 2021.

## **SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR 2021/22**

15. The MDSG has set out a number of suggested priorities for 2021/22 – to be agreed by the group post-election. These include:

- **Delivery of the Elections/Induction 2021 Project Objectives.** This includes offering Member 1-1s to all councillors and aiming for a completion rate of at least 60%.
- **Increase usage of the Member Portal as a self-service tool for Members.** Feedback suggests that Members are finding the new Member Portal easier to access and navigate. However, there is still work to do in increasing its usage as a key self-service tool.
- **Review of the Member Development Strategy.** The Member Development Strategy is reviewed on a biennial basis, with the next review due by the end of 2021. There is an opportunity to use the feedback from the Member Survey and the initial induction 1-1s to develop a revised strategy that supports councillors to be agile, effective and confident in their roles – thus benefitting the Council and its residents.
- **Continuing to achieve Charter Plus accreditation.** The Council's Member development and support offer is due to be peer reviewed in 2021. Achieving Charter Plus accreditation is a great way to receive feedback on our offer and assure Members and partners that the support they receive from Surrey is of a high standard.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That Council endorses the current approach to Member development and agrees that it is sufficient, equitable and effective.

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### **Lead/Contact Officer:**

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### **Sources/background papers:**

None

### **Annexes:**

None

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