



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, providing them with the knowledge and tools to enable them to perform their roles effectively.

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 as effective and equitable as possible.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP:

1. All Member development activity is monitored by the Member Development Steering Group (MDSG). The MDSG is cross party and the current membership is Mark Nuti (Chairman), Helyn Clack, Nick Darby, Robert Evans, Chris Townsend, Tim Hall, Will Forster and Hazel Watson, with the potential for a change of membership on an annual basis.
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 SESSIONS

3. Since May 2021, Member Development Sessions (formerly known as Member Seminars) have been held online. This was initially a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures, but the results of the Member Agile Working Survey demonstrated that Members felt the sessions should continue to be held remotely. This enables Members and officers to work in a more agile way, reducing travel time and costs, and contributing to the council's Greener Futures priority through a reduced environmental impact.

4. The average attendance at Member Development Sessions during 2022 to date has been 31% of Members; recordings of sessions are available on the Member Portal Teams channel for any Members unable to attend “live” together with the PowerPoint slides from each session (unfortunately the technology does not currently enable the monitoring of views of each recording).
5. The removal of Covid-19 restrictions and the council’s aim to be an Agile Organisation presents the opportunity for new and innovative ways of working, including using hybrid technology and in-person workshops to enable collaborative and interactive sessions. An in-person Member Development Workshop on the theme of Community Engagement (with hybrid contributions from external speakers) was held on Wednesday 15 June at Woodhatch Place, attended by 27 councillors – a 33% attendance rate.
6. A summary of the sessions provided during 2021-22 can be found at **Annex 1**.

MEMBER PORTAL

7. Since moving the Member Portal to the Microsoft Teams platform, officers have worked to develop the Portal as a one-stop shop for training videos, resources and support for Members. Developments in the past year have included the addition of dedicated channels for Surrey Fire & Rescue Service and Customers & Communities, enabling these services to provide regular briefings and updates on their work. In addition, officers from a range of services have direct access to the portal to post updates, and more still add information via the Democratic Services team.
8. Officers in Democratic Services have worked over the past year to raise awareness of the Member Portal amongst councillors and increase usage. A Member Development Session in December 2021 provided a live demonstration of how to access the portal and the range of information available.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

9. Feedback is vital for ensuring that our Member Development offer continues to meet the needs of councillors as well as enabling continuous improvement in future. Although the feedback we receive is generally very positive, the response rate is often low and means it is difficult to obtain a representative sample. During the past year, we have launched quick polls in Teams at the end of each Member Development session to capture immediately the views of those attending the session.

10. Members were asked to complete a more detailed survey regarding the 2021 Induction Programme during summer 2021. A 37% response rate was achieved, with a majority of responses being positive. The qualitative responses to the question of what would make councillors' role easier have been used to inform ongoing work with services on future information provision at a divisional level.

MEMBER INDUCTION PROGRAMME 2021

11. The MDSG had full oversight of the development and delivery of the Member Induction Programme which followed the May 2021 County Council elections. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the programme was largely delivered virtually. A summary of induction activity is attached as **Annex 2**.

CHARTER PLUS ACCREDITATION

12. 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 and was re-assessed as meeting the standard in 2015. On 5 March 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.
13. In September 2021, Surrey County Council was reaccredited with Charter Plus status, following a rigorous evaluation exercise by an independent panel. The panel assessed a portfolio of evidence demonstrating that the council's Member development offer met the required criteria for Charter Plus, followed by a day of interviews with Group Leaders, the Member Development Steering Group, and a focus group of newly elected councillors, as well as meeting with the Chief Executive and senior managers in Legal and Democratic Services. A number of recommendations were made, including the target of holding individual development conversations with at least 60% of councillors by September 2022.
14. The Panel's recommendations can be found at **Annex 3**. Current progress against these recommendations is included in the annex, and this will be monitored by the Member Development Steering Group on a regular basis to ensure that the council is well-placed to achieve accreditation again in 2024.

SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR 2022/23

15. The MDSG has set out a number of priorities for 2022/23. These include:

- a. 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 go in increasing its usage as a key self-service tool.
- b. Explore new and innovative ways of delivering and evaluating Member Development.** To explore the opportunities for Member development and training activities afforded by hybrid and agile working in the post-pandemic world, and to improve the ways in which Member development is evaluated, including increasing the number of councillors providing feedback on the offer.
- c. Continuing to achieve Charter Plus accreditation.** The council's Member Development and support offer is due to be reviewed in September 2023. Achieving Charter Plus accreditation is a great way to receive feedback on our offer and assure Members and partners that the support they receive is of a high standard.
- d. Report of Member-led review of Councillor Diversity and Inclusion** A task group was established in 2022 to review councillor diversity and inclusion in response to a key action in the 2021 Corporate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan. The remit of this group is to consider how SCC as an organisation can make changes to the way it operates, in order to remove barriers to both standing for election and carrying out the role of councillor for people from diverse backgrounds. It is due to report during 2022-23, following extensive discussions with staff representatives and stakeholders from the voluntary sector.
- e. Supporting Members with Casework** Working with Customer Services to ensure that Members have an easily understood process for responding to casework efficiently. This will include ensuring that Members can easily access divisional information that will help them to understand local issues and proactively communicate with residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

Lead/Contact Officers:

Rachel Basham/Sarah Quinn, Member Services Manager

rachel.basham@surreycc.gov.uk

07875 088 851

sarah.quinn@surreycc.gov.uk

07581 337391

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Member Development Sessions summary

Annex 2 – Member Induction Programme summary

Annex 3 – Charter Plus recommendations

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