

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL: ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-26

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 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 achieve our corporate priorities.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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

- 2.1 The Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) is Member-led and includes Members from a cross-section of political groups. It is supported by the Member Services Manager who can provide guidance on learning and development. 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.
- 2.2 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 maintain a high standard of Member Development and support which continues to meet the Charter Plus standard.
 4. To review and consider Member training and development needs with a view to producing comprehensive induction and ongoing training and development programmes.
 5. To monitor the expenditure of the dedicated Member Development budget.

3 IDENTIFYING MEMBER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

- 3.1 Every Member will be offered a Member 1-1 session on an annual basis, with the first to take place within six months of joining the Council. The purpose of this meeting will be for the Member to identify any training, development, or

support needs that they would like to address. Advice can also be provided on progressing casework and community initiatives. The meeting will take place with a member of the Democratic Services senior management team who will be able to signpost the Member to suitable training and development opportunities or support.

- 3.2 Members who wish to sit on certain committees (such as Planning and Regulatory Committee) must have undertaken the relevant training beforehand to ensure they are compliant with the legislation.
- 3.3 Democratic Services keep a record of all the learning and development activities attended by each Member.

4 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 4.1 The MDSG have agreed a Learning and Development plan for each year of the four -year Council term. The plan sets out what type of training and development a Member might expect to undertake in each year of the Council term.
- 4.2 Administrative support for Member development will be provided by Democratic Services.
- 4.3 The agreed Learning and Development Programme for the four-year term of the council is attached at **Appendix 1**. There are some training activities that all elected Members are expected to undertake, which are:
 - Member induction
 - Code of Conduct training
 - Committee relevant training e.g. planning legislation, induction sessions
 - Role-specific training prior to commencing certain roles, e.g. chairing skills
 - Scrutiny
 - Corporate Parenting
 - Equality Act 2020, with a specific focus on the Public Sector Equality Duty.

5 MEETING MEMBER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

- 5.1 Currently, a variety of approaches is taken to meeting Members' collective and individual development needs.

These include:

- 5.2 ***Role specific training:*** In addition to a generic role description for a Surrey County Councillor, the County Council has agreed role descriptions for all posts that receive a special responsibility allowance. These are attached as **Appendix 2**.

- 5.3 Role specific skills and knowledge are delivered through a variety of methods. For example, training sessions are offered to Committee Chairman in Chairing skills whilst Cabinet Members are offered the opportunity to attend LGA Leadership Academy events and relevant conferences. This also includes training relevant to members who represent the Council on outside bodies and as directors.
- 5.4 **Training on corporate initiatives and strategies:** Keeping Members informed and up to date is one of the essential outcomes for Member development. A programme of weekly Member Development Sessions is organised throughout the year to brief and engage Members on key issues within Surrey. These can be any issues; updates on policy initiatives, organisational priorities, or external changes impacting the council. The subject of each session is determined either by Member request or by a service identifying a need, for example, due to changes in corporate initiatives. Sessions have been held virtually since 2020 and Member feedback is that this is the most appropriate format for these sessions as it enables the sessions to be recorded and made available for any Members unable to attend the session “live”.
- 5.5 **Generic skills development:** Generic skills development and awareness training and drop-in sessions are offered to Members on subjects such as IT, finance etc throughout the year. These skills are particularly important in order to ensure that Members are able to play a full role in modern organisations. Officers will look for themes from Member 1-1s to help identify where generic skills training may be useful. Specific areas of skills development and awareness which will be focussed on include:
- 5.6 **a) IT/Digital Skills:** The upcoming Members Digital Skills Development Approach will cover the end of the current council term, where personal development plans for Individual Members based on their training needs feedback will be tested to assess if they provide additional benefit. Overall, the Members Digital Skills Development Approach will be weighted to deliver for the next Council term (2025-29).
- 5.7 In the 2025-29 term, the initial focus will be on promoting training on the day-to-day tools used by Members. Subsequently, it will look for opportunities to develop advanced skills and Members’ understanding of Digital, utilising the in-person member development days. A joint IT & Digital and Democratic Services Working Group will review progress and iterate the approach, reporting to the Member Development Steering Group.
- 5.8 **b) Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion:** As a public body we are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty, which is defined within the Equality Act as: -
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 5.9 The Council's [People Strategy 2023-28](#) sets out our plan to develop the workforce needed for the future by focusing on 4 cultural outcomes which describe how it should feel to work at the council. These align with our aims for Member Development, and we will:
- Ensure all Councillors have equal access to training and development opportunities.
 - Offer training on equalities and inclusion to all Councillors on an annual basis. This will provide Members with the skills necessary to comply with the Public Sector Equalities Duties.
 - Provide advice and guidance to Members setting out how to interpret and evaluate the Equalities Impact Assessments completed for formal reports.
- 5.10 **c) Member / Officer Relationships:** Developing and maintain strong member-officer relationships is pivotal for the sustainability and effectiveness of any Council. Since 2023 a detailed training programme has been undertaken to ensure that Members and senior officers have the skills and knowledge to work together effectively and have a clear understanding of their different roles. This training is continuing to be rolled out to a wider cohort of managers and will also form part of the induction plans for Members, following the elections in 2025 to ensure that both members and officers work together effectively at all times.
- 5.11 **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. In response to feedback received after the 2021 election, the 2025 Member Induction programme will remain spread out over the first year of the new Council term, ensuring that Members are not overwhelmed with information, whilst enabling them to have the essential information they need to carry out their roles. The 2025 induction programme will also ensure that training courses are a mixture of in person and virtual events, to facilitate Member access whilst also allowing Members the opportunity to meet more regularly outside of formal meetings.
- 5.12 Members who are elected at by-elections will be offered a tailored induction plan, as those Members do not have the benefit of the full programme that follows the scheduled County Council elections.
- 5.13 At any time during their term of office, when newly appointed as a member of a particular board, committee or to the Cabinet, Democratic Services will arrange for county councillors to receive an induction that sets out the information they need to perform the role.
- 5.14 **Personal development:** It is up to each individual Councillor to take responsibility for their own individual development. Where skills or knowledge

gaps are identified through a Member 1-1, officers can advise on possible training activities which could meet the development need.

- 5.15 Members are encouraged to consider different approaches to their development, including requesting a one to one with an appropriate officer, undertaking site visits, discussing a matter with a more experienced Member, carrying out some personal research or attending an external event.
- 5.16 **Individual support:** Where appropriate and where business needs allow, individual needs may be met on a 1-1 basis, for example, with IT skills or for Members with specific learning requirements.
- 5.17 All Members who are standing down at a scheduled election will be invited to complete an exit interview questionnaire 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 suggestions for improvement.
- 5.18 When planning events, consideration will be given to the need to accommodate the other commitments that Members have as far as possible. Alternative timings will be provided if possible, and recordings of virtual sessions and training materials will be made available online via the Member Reference Library.
- 5.19 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

- 6.1 Information about events organised by accredited training organisations will be circulated to Members throughout the year. Members can apply to attend external training courses by completing an application form.
- 6.2 Attendance on any external learning and development event is subject to the prior agreement of the Member Services Manager. A summary of all external training course attendances will be shared with the MDSG on a quarterly basis. Members are expected to share their learning from these events and training materials will be circulated where appropriate.
- 6.3 The MDSG has agreed a protocol for Members' attendance at learning and development events attached at **Appendix 3**.

7 MEMBER REFERENCE LIBRARY

- 7.1 Since May 2017, Members have had access to a Member Portal which provides them with online access to training and development materials. This was provided via a confidential channel within MS Teams. Presentations and other training materials shared at briefings are posted on the channel for those

Members who are unable to attend events in person, and officers from across the Council were able to post directly to the Portal.

- 7.2 In 2023 work was undertaken to evaluate the usage of the Member Portal and to ensure that information was shared and stored in a most appropriate way to facilitate retrieval by Members.
- 7.3 Following this work the MDSG agreed that the Member Portal was most suited as a repository of information and not a primary means of communication or collaboration space. Work was undertaken to create a content management policy and a streamlined file storage system. Retained files, which met the content management policy were then transferred to a new MS Teams group, which was named the Member Reference Library to clarify the purpose of the information repository. Officer access the group was also restricted to those who could demonstrate a business need.

8 BUDGET FOR MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 8.1 An allocated budget is set aside each year for Member Development from the overall Democratic Services budget. This is intended to meet the cost of the annual learning and development programme. The budget is managed by the Member Services Manager and monitored by the MDSG on a quarterly basis.

9 EVALUATING MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 Attenders at learning and development activities held in-house are requested to complete an online evaluation form to establish the effectiveness of the activity and to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Members attending external learning and development events are also asked to complete an online evaluation form, to inform decisions about future attendance by other Members.
- 9.2 The views of Members will also be sought regularly through Member 1-1 conversations and surveys.

10 INCREASING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT IN TRAINING ACTIVITY

- 10.1 The council is committed to engaging as many councillors as possible in Member development activity. Over the next two years, Democratic Services will try and increase engagement from Members by:
- Hosting member development sessions at a wider range of venues, reducing the travel and time commitments for councillors attending.

- Playing a stronger role in quality assuring all member briefings and training sessions so that councillors feel that time invested in development at SCC is time well spent.

11 SOUTH EAST EMPLOYERS ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER

11.1 The authority was awarded Charter status by South East Employers in October 2011, and this was renewed in April 2015. In April 2019, the authority achieved Charter Plus status. A reassessment exercise took place on 30 September 2021 with Surrey County Council being reaccredited with Charter Plus status. The MDSG is committed to continuing to meet the requirements of Charter Plus Scheme for Member Development.

12 STRATEGY REVIEW

12.1 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.

David Lewis
Chairman, Member Development Steering Group
Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
June 2024

Next review due: 2026 and every other year thereafter

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Four year learning and development plan

Appendix 2: Member role profiles

Appendix 3: Protocol for Elected Member Attendance at External Courses and Conferences, and application form

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