



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, tools and understanding of their responsibilities to enable them to perform their roles effectively.

This report provides an annual overview of the council's approach to member development, to provide assurance that the current approach is effective and equitable.

BACKGROUND:

1. All member development activity is monitored by the Member Development Steering Group (MDSG). The MDSG is cross party, and the current membership is David Lewis {Cobham} (Chairman), Harry Boparai, Helyn Clack, Robert Evans OBE, Tim Hall, Steven McCormick, Chris Townsend and Hazel Watson, with the potential for a change of membership on an annual basis.
2. The group meets informally, five times a year, to oversee the delivery of the Member Development Programme and other councillor support issues.
3. The member training and development budget is £21,420 per year and spend against this budget is monitored by the MDSG.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

4. Since May 2020, Member Development Sessions have been held online. This was initially a response to the Covid-19 pandemic measures, and the results of the Member Agile Working Survey which requested these sessions continue to be held remotely. This enables members and officers to work in a more agile way, reducing travel time, costs, and contributing to the council's Greener Futures priority through a reduced environmental impact.

5. In 2024 there were 28 Member Development Sessions relevant to all members and an additional 4 area specific sessions. The average attendance at Member Development Sessions in 2024 has been 25% of Councillors. Slides presented at sessions are shared in advance to councillors, and recordings of sessions are available on the Member Reference Library for any councillors unable to attend “live”, together with a copy of the slides from each session.
6. At the request of MDSG, in January 2025, an evening Member Development Session was held to determine if this timing would attract more councillors, compared to the morning sessions. The evening session replicated the content of the session held earlier in the day and across both sessions 26 councillors (32%) attended, with 17 (21%) attending the morning session and 9 (11%) in the evening session.
7. An in-person Member Development Day was held in October 2024. The day included information sessions on current AI usage work within the Council, a refresher on Corporate Parenting responsibilities for councillors, a marketplace of information stands on council services and projects and an afternoon training course on public speaking. The day was attended by 22 out of 81 councillors (27%) and feedback was very positive.
8. A summary of the Member Development Sessions provided in 2024 can be found in **Appendix 1**.

TRAINING COURSES

9. Members may request training and development support. In the first instance the council review the request to see whether it can be provided in house or alternatively seek external providers where it is cost effective for the Council and the needs require such expenditure. Members may also request to attend external training and conferences. To ensure that such training requests are dealt with equitably, members are asked to complete a short external training request form detailing how the course will support their development as a County Councillor.
10. The Council utilises the offer from the Local Government Association (LGA) which hosts a range of relevant training courses for members.
11. In 2024, 14 councillors attended four different external conferences including those held by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the County Councils Network. In addition, 10 councillors attended externally run training courses, provided by the LGA and other organisations. An overview of conferences and external training attended by councillors can be found in **Appendix 2**.
12. A series of visits to the Customer Services Team, based at Dakota, were organised in June and October 2024. The visits allowed members to learn

more about the work the Customer Service Team undertake in dealing with enquiries and supporting residents. 11 councillors (14%) attended a visit.

13. In July 2024, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) was commissioned to run bespoke training for Scrutiny Members on Budget setting and Financial Scrutiny. The purpose of this training was to provide Select Committee members with information and guidance to build their confidence and practical skills in budget setting and financial scrutiny and be equipped to perform their scrutiny role effectively. The session was attended by approximately 20 Select Committee members and provided an increased understanding of the basics of council finances, the role and potential impact of scrutiny in budget setting financial monitoring, and effective approaches to budget scrutiny.

MEMBER REFERENCE LIBRARY

14. In April 2024, the Member Reference Library was launched as a repository of information for councillors, with an improved file storage system, and a content policy agreed with MDSG. All the information to be retained from the Member Portal was transferred over prior to launch and throughout the year additional information has been added.

MID-TERM MEMBER CONVERSATIONS

15. Mid Term conversations have taken place with all councillors in early 2024, focusing on what support or training would be beneficial for the 2025 inductions plan. 40 councillors (49%) took up the opportunity and the common themes which arose included:
 - Time management (particularly if working)
 - Member networking opportunities
 - Casework support
 - Mixture of preferences between in person and online training
 - Suggestions for 2025 induction courses

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-26

16. The Member Development Strategy has been refreshed to align this with the organisational priorities and to support the needs of elected members for the next two years. It was noted that the strategy will cover the remainder of the current term for members, as well as the first year of a new term following the elections in May 2025. Therefore, the induction plans in 2025 formed an important part of the update to the strategy.
17. The strategy includes training approaches which work best for members and specific skills such as:
 - IT/Digital Skills
 - Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion

- Member/Officer Relationships

18. The updated Member Development Strategy 2024-26 was approved by Council in July 2024.

BE A SURREY COUNTY COUNCILLOR CAMPAIGN

19. The Be A Surrey County Councillor campaign launched at the beginning of May 2024 with the aim of providing information to residents considering standing for election. 11 drop-in sessions were planned to be held at libraries, on a range of times and days, and an early evening event was planned for Woodhatch Place to allow residents to find out more about the role of councillor if they were considering standing for election.
20. Due to the General Election, the remaining 6 events were cancelled due to pre-election period restrictions.
21. In Autumn 2024, the campaign was relaunched, and there has been some interest from residents which officers have responded to, as well as signposting to resources on the Council and LGA websites.
22. In February 2025, the government confirmed that Surrey is to be part of the first wave of areas undertaking Local Government Reorganisation and that Surrey County Council's elections would be postponed until 2026. Whilst the campaign is no longer being actively promoted, information about becoming a councillor is still available on the Council website.

2025 INDUCTION PLANS

23. Following the government decision in February 2025, to postpone the elections, plans for the new member induction have been currently halted. Some of the planned induction sessions will still be held as refresher sessions for existing members, in line with the 4 year learning and development plan included within the Member Development Strategy 2024-26.

CHARTER PLUS

24. Surrey was accredited with the LGA 'Charter Plus' status in 2018 and 2021, in recognition of the standard of member development and support offered.
25. Accreditation was due for renewal in December 2024. MDSG decided not to undertake the accreditation process, due to the resource implications. MDSG is committed to ensuring that member development activity is maintained and supports the council's objectives.

SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR 2025/26

26. The MDSG has set out a number of priorities for 2025/26. These include:

- **Preparing for Local Government Reform and Devolution:** Ensuring members are equipped with the skills and knowledge required for the upcoming changes.
- **Supporting members:** Ensuring that member wellbeing is a key focus and that members feel supported in their extended term of office.
- **Member Development Days:** Building on the positive feedback from October 2024, further in person days are being planned for Autumn 2025 and Spring 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

Lead/Contact Officers:

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Sources/background papers:

None

Annexes/Appendices:

Appendix 1: Member Development Sessions January - December 2024
Appendix 2: Conferences and external courses attended

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