

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL:

ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2021-23

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 status.
 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 At least one day a month is specified as a 'Member Development Day' and these dates are published in advance in the online 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.
- 4.3 Administrative support for Member development will be provided by Democratic Services.
- 4.4 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.

5 MEETING MEMBER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

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

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.
- 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 (formerly Member Seminars) 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 the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Following the results of the Member Agile Working Survey in the summer of 2020, MDSG agreed that these sessions should continue to take place virtually. Using the Teams platform enables the sessions to be recorded and made available on the Member Portal 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. In addition, officers can share updates and tips on the Member Portal, enabling a more agile way of working without having to attend the office in person. 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.
- 5.6 **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 2017 election, the 2021 Member Induction programme has been spread out over the first year of the new Council term, ensuring that Members are not overwhelmed with information, whilst ensuring that they have the essential information they need to carry out their roles. The 2021 induction included a new course focused on Members’ role as community leaders.
- 5.7 A successful series of pre-election events was held in 2020 and 2021 aimed at informing prospective councillors about the role of a Member and Surrey County Council’s current challenges and priorities, as well as information about the support that can be offered by officers and established political groups once elected. This included virtual events held during the lockdown period.
- 5.8 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.
- 5.9 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 in order to perform the role.
- 5.10 **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.
- 5.11 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.

- 5.12 **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.
- 5.13 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.
- 5.14 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 Portal.
- 5.15 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 PORTAL

- 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 is now 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 Democratic Services, Communications and Community Partnerships and Engagement can post directly to the Portal. During 2022, work will be undertaken to raise the profile of the Member Portal amongst those councillors not currently making full use of this resource, and further training on Microsoft Teams will be provided to encourage Members to maximise their use of this technology.

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.
- 9.3 From 2022, Impact Assessments will be carried out on a selection of Member learning and development activities to facilitate more effective evaluation of the impact of the council's investment in this area. The Impact Assessment Form is attached as **Appendix 4**, and results will be reported to the MDSG on a quarterly basis.

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.
 - Increasing online access to training through supporting members to use Teams, improving the usability of the Member Portal and ensuring that Members can be recognised for participating in training remotely.
 - 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.

Mark Nuti
Chairman, Member Development Steering Group
Cabinet Member for Communities

November 2021

Next review due: November 2023 and every other year thereafter

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Four-year learning and development programme

Appendix 2: Member role profiles including required skills/development – Chair's Role Profile revised 2021.

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

Appendix 4: Impact Assessment form for Member Learning and Development Activities