



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, 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 Mark Nuti (Chairman), Harry Boparai, Helyn Clack, Robert Evans OBE, Tim Hall, David Lewis (Cobham), Catherine Powell, Chris Townsend 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 2020, Member Development Sessions 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 since July 2022 to the end of 2023 has been 25% of members. Any slides presented at session are now shared in advance to members, and recordings of sessions are available on the Member Portal Teams channel for any members unable to attend “live” together with a copy of the slides from each session.
5. Two in-person Member Development days were held in 2023, to give members the opportunity to attend collaborative and interactive sessions which are not possible online. The first day, held in February 2023, was attended by 21 councillors (26%). The second day, held in October 2023, offered an option for half-day attendance for Members, and was attended by 20 councillors (25%).
6. A summary of the member development sessions provided since July 22 can be found in **Appendix 1**.

MEMBER REFERENCE LIBRARY

7. Research work has been undertaken in 2023 to review the usage of the Member Portal, held on the Microsoft Teams platform alongside any barriers. The accessibility of available information was also considered to ensure members were able to self-serve effectively.
8. At the November 2023 meeting, the MDSG agreed with the recommendations from the research confirming that the Member Portal was most suited as a repository of information and not a primary means of communication or collaboration space. To address the lack of understanding and mix of expectations about the purpose of the channel, it will be renamed to ‘Member Reference Library’.
9. Work is currently underway to review material stored on the current Member Portal. Retained material will be migrated to a new Teams site, in Spring 2024, with improved file storage to aid retrieval of information by members.

DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING

10. In July 2023, the MDSG requested a clearer roadmap for continuous development of members’ digital skills. Democratic Services have collaborated with IT & Digital to develop an offer that can be tailored to individual skills levels and embedded into long term business as usual activities, as opposed to limited ad-hoc training.
11. As part of ‘tailoring to different needs’ it was agreed to undertake a digital skills self-assessment through a training needs survey. A Digital Skills audit survey was run for members throughout October 2023, with members offered the opportunity to feedback through electronic or paper versions with 28 members responding (35%).

12. IT & Digital are responding to the themes that came out of the member digital skills survey and are in the process of developing a selection of member specific training sessions and videos.

MYSURREY

13. Democratic Services worked closely with the MySurrey team to deliver bespoke member training for the new system. 48 members (60%) attended the formal training sessions, with Democratic Services offering additional one to one training for any members that required it.

EXTERNAL TRAINING

14. All members are entitled to request training and development support. Our first port of call will always be to see what can be offered in-house however sometimes a training need cannot be met in-house and councillors can 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 councillor.

15. The LGA runs a range of relevant training courses for councillors which are regularly promoted by the Member Services Manager to members.

16. In June 2023 the Centre for Good Scrutiny (CfGS) was commissioned to run some bespoke training courses for Surrey to ensure that members were all equipped with the required skills to enable them to effectively scrutinise decisions. The first session was for Select Committee Chairs & Vice-Chairs, and the second session was for all members of Select Committees.

CHARTER PLUS ACREDITATION

17. Surrey has been accredited with the Local Government Association (LGA) 'Charter Plus' status in 2018 and 2021, in recognition of the standard of member development and support offered. Assessment recommendations are monitored by the MDSG, with reaccreditation due in Autumn 2024.

SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR 2024/25

18. The MDSG has set out a number of priorities for 2024/25. These include:

- **Deliver the 2025 Be A Surrey County Councillor campaign.** Through a series of countywide events, promote awareness of the role of a councillor to encourage residents to consider standing for election.

- **Undertake a series of mid-term Member Conversations.** These will be an opportunity for members to have an individual conversation with a manager in Democratic Services to discuss how they are finding their role, any training or support they feel would be beneficial and suggestions for the 2025 induction plans.
- **Review of the Member Development Strategy.** The Member Development Strategy is reviewed on a biennial basis, with the next review now due. There is an opportunity to use feedback from member conversations and to ensure alignment with organisational policies, such as the People Strategy.
- **Prepare for the induction of the 2025 member cohort.** Gather feedback from current members on key elements for inclusion in the induction so that members are supported in their roles and effectively able to undertake their duties. This will also consider the introduction of more in-person and informal networking opportunities, alongside virtual training.
- **Launch the Member Reference Library.** Continue with work started in 2023 to review the content of the current Member Portal, ensuring that required information is easily retrievable by members.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

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Sources/background papers:

Appendix 1: Member Development Sessions July 22 - December 2023
