

Governance Committee

18 January 2021

Report of the Member Development Group

Report by Chairman, Member Development Group

Electoral division: Not applicable

Summary

This report by the Member Development Group (MDG) provides an update on member development activity as well as the outcomes of the assessment for South East Employers' Member Development Charter status and the MDG review of the local member role. It also updates on plans for member induction after the May 2021 Council Elections, including possible mandatory training.

Recommendations

Governance Committee is asked to:

- (1) Note the member development activity update and plans for future member training and development;
 - (2) Consider the outcome of the Member Development Charter assessment carried out by South East Employers;
 - (3) Consider the conclusions of the review of the local member role carried out by MDG; and
 - (4) Comment on plans for member induction and agree what training should be mandatory.
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Proposal

1. Background and context

1.1 The Member Development Group (MDG) oversees all aspects of the member role and has responsibility for managing the member development process. It is a sub-group of the Governance Committee. This report provides an update from the MDG meeting held in December 2020.

2. Member Development Activity October 2019 to December 2019

2.1 Four virtual member development events have been held since the last meeting of MDG in October 2020, as set out in the table below:

Date	Topics	Attendance
22 October	Member Day: Proposed Budget 2021/22: Financial Planning in Uncertain Times	37
22 October	Training: Chairmanship Skills, provided by South East Employers	16
12 November	Member Day: West Sussex Reset Plan	35
17 November	Training: Children's and Adults' Safeguarding	26

- 2.2 Since moving to virtual sessions following the public health emergency, attendance rates have been good, and this has continued to be the case. The two Member Days had attendance of 50% and above, the Chairmanship Skills event on 22 October was oversubscribed and the safeguarding training was well attended compared with the in-person sessions held prior to March 2020.
- 2.3 Whilst the volume of online feedback following events has continued to be low the comments received have been positive. Members particularly welcomed the style of the Reset Plan event, with the smaller workshop sessions providing the opportunity to engage thoroughly. MDG has agreed make use of this style for future events where appropriate.
- 2.4 Plans for future Member Days are set out below. MDG considers all proposals for Member Day topics, taking account of member needs, priorities and service requirements.

Date	Topic
14 January	Member Day Session: Budget/Local Government Finance
26 January	Member Day Session: TBC
22 February	Commissioner Update on Children First Improvement Programme

3. **Member Development Charter and Charter Plus**

- 3.1 It was reported to this Committee in November that the County Council had just been awarded Charter status following the South East Employers' assessment for the Member Development Charter. The full report of the assessment was provided as a late paper to the MDG meeting in December, but as members had not had time to review this fully they will be considering this in more detail at their next meeting – to include a review of the MDG Terms of Reference. MDG will report back to Governance on its conclusions in March.
- 3.2 Governance Committee is invited to consider the assessment conclusions and recommendations, set out below, and to identify any specific issues it wishes MDG to follow up on.
- 3.3 Overall, the assessment concluded that there is an impressive commitment and passion for learning throughout West Sussex County Council – evident on the assessment day from both councillors and officers. There is a clear Councillor Development Strategy and the learning programme responds and supports the priorities of the West Sussex Plan. MDG has a high level of engagement from members and is led by a committed and enthusiastic Chair. The assessment recommended that the Council should aspire to achieve Charter Plus Standard within the next three years. Other recommendations were:
- a) Introduce Training Needs Analysis and Personal Development Plans from May 2021, encouraging councillors to identify and take responsibility for their own development. Target a take up of 60-70% for TNA/PDP's and

undertake a skills audit of councillors to identify skills and interests of all councillors following the election.

- b) MDG to develop a more strategic focus and to consider evaluating its Terms of Reference and size to facilitate this. MDG also recommended to:
- Lead a review on the impact of Covid-19 on the future of member development (including both delivery methods and training priorities).
 - Consider the development of e-learning modules and sharing internal training videos via intranet platform. To further extend digital out-reach with regards to councillor development.
 - Evaluate the Be a Councillor Programme
Monitor and encourage greater councillor engagement and participation in councillor development.
- c) For future member training and development:
- To provide development and support to councillors regarding social media and best practice use.
 - To develop a forward looking and innovative induction programme led by MDG. To review and evaluate the programme at the end of 2021.
 - To develop a separate strategy for leadership development led by MDG. To include external coaching and mentoring support and ensure equality of access to leadership development. All Cabinet members to participate on LGA Leadership Programmes and minority group leaders offered development support.
 - For scrutiny development, to prioritise new scrutiny responsibilities within the national guidance published in 2019 Guidance. To provide interactive role-playing support with regard to scrutiny questioning tools and techniques.
 - To provide regular support to Chairs and Vice Chairs with chairing skills and to further develop the use of Teams and enable a future hybrid meeting process.

4. Review of the Local Member Role

- 4.1 Governance Committee asked MDG to carry out a review of the local member role, following up on issues raised through the Good Governance project and to feed into member induction plans for 2021. MDG carried out this review during October and November, finalising its conclusions at its December meeting. It reviewed a range of information including:
- The member job description
 - Support currently offered by the Council (including training and induction previously provided)
 - Feedback from members, including through an all-member survey carried out in November, informal County Local Committee meetings and from the Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities
 - Information from other county councils and the Local Government Association
 - Feedback from some of the service lead officers most closely involved in supporting members in their local role (Transport and Countryside, Local Highways Operations and Communities).

4.2 Key points raised through this evidence review were:

- The definition of the local member role as set out in the generic member job description provides a good starting point for understanding of the role.
- Specific training on managing local casework should continue to be provided as part of the induction programme and should involve returning members, who can provide advice on how best to manage workload. It is important to clarify the different roles and responsibilities of members and officers and to set out what members can reasonably be expected to influence.
- Members need to be signposted to the information available to support them in their local role. MDG recognised that a wide range of information is available, but that members don't always know how to access this. Checklists of information on specific topics are useful, with MDG welcoming the new checklist developed to help members deal with matters relating to Highways.
- The member survey responses showed that the main issues raised locally with members are (in rank order): Highways, Education, grant funding, Adult Social Care, other councils' responsibilities, Children's Social Care, Public Health, Waste/Recycling and Safeguarding. Members need accurate and up-to-date service contact information to help them deal with these issues, and request that the induction programme should include information on these key service areas.
- Members stress the importance of being informed and kept updated on activity in their division. Most have close links with their Area Highways Managers and Partnerships and Communities Team, but it is important that officers are aware of the need to keep local members updated. Service lead officers' feedback included the potential to develop virtual locality-based drop-in sessions for members on key topics, such as Highways.
- Community leadership is an important aspect of the role, and members value the opportunity to engage with their residents. Responding to changes such as increasing use of digital and social media will be an important for future engagement with communities. Some members were frustrated by the inability to access Zoom, as this is widely used by town/parish councils and other community groups that members engage with.

4.3 MDG concluded that there is considerable support and information available to members in their local role, but that it can sometimes be difficult and confusing for members to navigate their way through this. It agreed that learning from this review should be embedded into its work to develop the member induction programme. The following specific areas for action were identified:

- a) Training on the local role of county councillors and managing local casework should be provided as part of the core induction programme, to include through locality-based area days. These area days should provide key local data and links to community organisations. Other training to support members in the local role should be provided, including on dealing with difficult customers/complaints and on using social media.
- b) The Mine (members' intranet) and the Bulletin (members' weekly newsletter) need to be better promoted. The content of the Mine should be reviewed by MDG as part of the induction programme development. The Members' Guide to using Zoom should also be promoted.
- c) Checklists should be provided for members for dealing with casework relating to education, grant funding, adult social care, children's social care, safeguarding, Public Health and waste/recycling.

- d) The potential for services to provide virtual drop-in sessions for members should be explored, with an initial focus on Highways and Communities.
- e) Officers should be reminded of the importance of keeping local members updated on relevant information/activities relating to their divisions.

5. **Member Induction Programme 2021**

- 5.1 MDG is developing the member induction programme for after the May 2021 County Council elections. This has been informed by feedback from members and is taking account of COVID-19 restrictions. There is no indication at this stage that the elections will be delayed due to the public health emergency, so MDG is continuing to plan for an induction programme beginning in May. However, if there are any delays the timing of the programme will be adjusted and revised accordingly. Plans include options to deliver sessions virtually, but with the potential to provide face-to-face training and induction where this is possible.
- 5.2 The induction programme will follow a similar structure to that of 2017, with four main elements:
 - a) **Pre-election period** (to May 6) – providing information and support for candidates. Included in this is the [‘Be a Councillor’](#) programme, with a website providing useful information and a number of events held for prospective candidates. A candidates’ event is due to be held in February 2021.
 - b) **Initial induction** (7 to 20 May) – getting newly elected members set up and ready for the first Full Council meeting on 21 May. This will include the provision of IT kit and initial IT training.
 - c) **Core Induction and Key Skills Training** (21 May to 16 July) – information, support, resources and training for all members (new and returning). The 16 July Full Council marks the end of this core induction period, but elements of the training and support provided will continue and become part of the ongoing member development programme.
 - d) **Specific member role training** (May to October) – supporting and training members in specific roles they are appointed to. This will include leadership development, chairmanship and scrutiny training as identified through the Charter for Member Development assessment, as well as bespoke training for specific committees, panels and boards.
- 5.3 The core induction programme will focus on ensuring all members have the information they need to understand and fulfil the role of being a county councillor. This will be delivered through a mixture of in-person training (either virtual or face-to-face as appropriate), e-learning and online information and guidance. Sessions provided will include:
 - The roles and responsibilities of councillors
 - Corporate priorities
 - Council services and functions
 - Local government finance
 - Code of Conduct and Standards
 - Governance arrangements and processes (including a mock debate, with training on dealing with rules and procedures)

- Key initial training on IT, corporate parenting, safeguarding, questioning skills, scrutiny, social media and managing local casework.
- Area-based days, providing members with information and data on their localities

5.4 MDG has reviewed which elements of this training should be mandatory for all members. The following training has previously been agreed as mandatory:

- Code of Conduct and Standards
- Safeguarding Adults
- Safeguarding Children
- Cyber security and data protection

In addition, MDG proposes that training on corporate parenting and on diversity and equality should also be mandatory. Governance is asked to confirm the addition of these two training elements to the list of mandatory training set out above. It is also invited to consider whether any other training should be mandatory from May 2021, how this should be monitored going forward and how best to encourage members to complete this training.

5.5 A final update on the induction programme is due to be provided to this Committee at its meeting in March.

6. **Other options considered**

6.1 Other options will be considered within the Committee's debate.

7. **Consultation, engagement and advice**

7.1 All members attending Member Day sessions are invited to complete an evaluation survey, the analysis of which is reported to MDG to inform future plans. MDG carried out a survey of all members during November 2020 to gather feedback to help inform both its review of the local member role and the member induction programme. In addition, for the review of the local member role, MDG reviewed a range of evidence, including: member feedback gathered through the informal County Local Committee (CLC) meetings held in October/November 2020; information from the 2019 CLC review; feedback from the Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue and Communities; information from other county councils in the South East region; feedback from service lead officers (Transport and Countryside, Local Highways Operations and Communities).

8. **Finance**

8.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from the content of this report. Plans for member development and induction can be met from within existing resources. The budget for member training and development is £15,700 per year.

9. **Risk implications and mitigations**

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
County councillors are unable to fulfil their roles	The member development and induction programmes provide training and information tailored to their needs and overseen by the Member Development Group

10. **Policy alignment and compliance**

- 10.1 There are no legal, Crime and Disorder Act, human rights, climate change or public health implications directly arising from this report. The member development programme aims to meet the Equality Duty through providing fair opportunities for learning and development to all members. Social value is provided by ensuring members receive support and training to be able to fulfil their roles effectively and therefore help the council to achieve its aims and objectives.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None