

Report to Governance Committee

6 November 2023

Report of the Member Development Group

Report by the Chairman of the Member Development Group

Electoral division(s): Not applicable

Summary

The Member Development Group (MDG) is an advisory body to the Governance Committee on all aspects of county councillors' roles and the training and development they need to undertake their work on the County Council. It reports to the Governance Committee on its work and member development activities undertaken. This report provides an update on the member development programme for 2023/24 and on activity undertaken by MDG since the last update to this Committee in June 2023.

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

1. Background and context

- 1.1 The Member Development Group (MDG) is a cross-party advisory body to the Governance Committee, chaired by the Vice-Chairman of the Council. It has ownership of the annual member training and development programme to ensure this reflects members' needs as well as corporate priorities. Other key MDG responsibilities are a regular all-member survey (generally carried out in alternate years); monitoring the member training budget; overseeing participation in the Councillor Development Charter; and ownership of the member induction programme. MDG's work is informed by its agreed Member Development Strategy, which provides the structure for councillor learning and development.
- 1.2 MDG meets three times per year to review member development activities, assess any feedback from members and plan the future programme. It is also kept updated on its areas of responsibility in-between meetings. It last met on 16 October 2023.

2. Member development programme 2023/24

- 2.1 Details of member development activities carried out since April 2023 as well as future plans are set out in the table below.

Date	Details	Attendees
05/04/22	Highways briefing: on-street parking management	31
10/05/23	Resilience & Emergencies – WSCC role and the role of members	34
10/05/23	Highways briefing: Community Highways Schemes and Traffic Regulation Orders	32
24/05/23	Countryside Services: Visit to Pagham Harbour	14
June/July 2023	Annual Locality Sessions (informal information sharing sessions for members in their district/borough area)	47
28/06/23	Digital Infrastructure in the Horticultural Sector - West Sussex Growers Association, tour of sites in Chichester	12
07/07/23	Health scrutiny in a changing landscape (delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny for the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee members, with the equivalent committees in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove)	6
19/07/23	Council Plan and Budget session	38
06/09/23	Water: who does what (briefing involving Southern Water and the Environment Agency)	31
26/09/23	Lyminster By-pass site visit and briefing on major highways projects – opportunities and challenges	7
06/10/23	School Place Planning briefing	40
18/10/23	Council Plan and Budget session	TBC
08/11/23	Adult Services Briefing and Public Health Briefing	-
06/12/23	Highways Briefing: lane rentals	-
19/01/24	Council Plan and Budget session	-
21/02/24	Visit to the new Horsham Fire and Training Centre	-

- 2.2 The overall attendance rate for sessions to which all members were invited is 47%. Most sessions have a hybrid option for joining virtually and online resources are available as a follow-up (recordings of sessions, presentations etc). Members are asked to give feedback on sessions through an evaluation survey. The overall response rate to these surveys is 48% and satisfaction levels with the programme are high. Feedback shows that members generally find sessions useful and informative and like the ability to join remotely where possible. Issues for improvement picked up by MDG include the need for presentation slides to be shared in advance of sessions and for more time for question-and-answer sessions.
- 2.3 The requirement for all members to complete their mandatory training within one year of election has now been met, with 100% of members having completed this training. Mandatory training requirements will be reviewed by MDG as part of its planning for the 2025 member induction programme, but currently included are the following: Code of Conduct, Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children, Corporate Parenting, IT Security and Data Protection and Equalities.

3. Other activities carried out by MDG

3.1 **All-member survey:** A survey was carried out in summer 2023, focused on members' experiences of and views on personal safety as well as future priorities for the member development programme. Forty-four members completed the survey, a response rate of 63%. The survey analysis was reviewed by MDG at its meeting in October 2023 and will be shared with all members, including information on the following outcomes agreed by MDG:

- A new councillor guide to personal safety has been agreed and will be made available to all members, as well as being shared with district and borough councils.
- All members will be offered the option of requesting a personal attack alarm.
- Social media training will be offered to members.
- Topics suggested for member development and training will be considered by MDG as part of its work programme planning for 2024/25.

3.2 **Be a Councillor:** The Be a Councillor programme will run up to the 2025 elections and is aimed at encouraging and supporting people thinking of standing for election. Online information is being updated and seven Be a Councillor events will be held between February and June 2024, with one event in each district/borough area, as set out below:

Event	Date, time & venue	Details
Be a Councillor panel event (in-person only)	20/02/24 (Tues) 6.30pm-8.30pm Crawley Library	Hosted by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, with a panel made up of Group Leaders and senior Council officers
Be a Councillor one-hour drop-in	05/03/24 (Tues) 4.15pm, Shoreham-by-Sea Library	Opportunity to get information and ask questions. Group Leaders to nominate members (approx. 3 in total) to take part, supported by officers from Democratic Services
Be a Councillor one-hour drop-in	21/03/24 (Thurs) 4.15pm, Littlehampton Library	As above
Be a Councillor one-hour drop-in	11/05/24 (Sat) 10.30am, Worthing Library	As above
Be a Councillor one-hour drop-in	16/05/24 (Thurs) 2.30pm, Burgess Hill Library	As above
Be a Councillor one-hour drop-in	05/06/24 (Weds) 4.15pm, Horsham Library	As above
Be a Councillor panel event (hybrid)	18 June 2024 (Tues) 6.30pm-8.30pm County Hall, Chichester	Hosted by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, with a panel made up of Group Leaders and senior Council officers

3.3 Details of these events will be shared via the Be a Councillor website and with political associations, district/borough councils and WSALC (West Sussex Association of Local Councils). They will also be promoted through channels

including social media, press releases and the Council's e-newsletters. County councillors will be asked to share details through their own local networks.

3.4 **Councillor Development Charter:** The Council was awarded the Councillor Development Charter in November 2020. This provides a structured framework to enhance and support member training and development. It also provides independent accreditation of the Council's approach to member development. The Charter is due for renewal by the end of March 2024 and MDG has agreed that a submission to re-apply for Charter status should be made. As part of this submission, MDG will explore opportunities to enhance the member development programme.

3.5 **Member development regional round-table:** An informal round-table event was held in September 2023, to provide an opportunity for county councils in the south east to share learning and best practice regarding their approaches to member development. This first round-table was mainly an introductory session, comparing approaches and sharing common challenges. It was attended by the MDG Chairman and Head of Democratic Services, with other councils represented being Essex and East Sussex County Councils. Surrey and Hampshire County Councils gave apologies but are keen to attend the next meeting planned for summer 2025.

4. MDG future plans

4.1 MDG will continue to monitor member attendance levels, review feedback on events and plan the member development programme. Other areas of activity planned by MDG for the future include:

- The development of new guidance for members on their local role
- A review of the Member Development Strategy
- Planning for the Member Induction Programme 2025

5. Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

5.1 Alternatives to the proposed member training and development activities may be considered within the Committee's debate.

6. Consultation, engagement and advice

6.1 All members attending member development sessions are invited to provide evaluation feedback, which is analysed and reported to MDG to inform future plans. An all-member survey developed by MDG was carried out in summer 2023, which gathered feedback on members' personal safety and the future training and development programme. The Officer Executive Leadership Team is regularly invited to comment on plans for member training and development.

7. Finance

7.1 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 member training and development budget is £15,000 per year and spend against this budget is monitored by MDG. Costs covered by this budget include training provided by external trainers, member attendance at external training events, conferences and seminars and catering, venue hire and other ancillary costs.

8. 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

9. Policy alignment and compliance

- 9.1 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