

## **Appendix 1**

### **Member Development Group: Report to Cabinet 2020-21**

#### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of the Member Development Group is to provide a forum where members can advise on the planning, delivery and evaluation of member development activities. The Group is made up of a member of each political group and is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources.

The Group is required to report to Cabinet on an annual basis. This report meets this requirement and summarises the work of the Group during the 2020-21 municipal year.

#### **2. Terms of Reference**

The Group's Terms of Reference are as follows:-

The Member Development Group will advise on the planning, delivery and evaluation of member development activities and make recommendations to Cabinet where appropriate. The Member Development Group will report to Cabinet on an annual basis.

The membership of the Member Development Group will be the relevant Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Member Development and one member from each political group represented on the Council. The Group will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder. Members of the Group will be responsible for the promotion of Member Development within their political group.

The Member Development Group will:-

- oversee the provision of member development opportunities;
- advise on policies and procedures relating to member development; and monitor their implementation and effectiveness;
- regularly review the level and allocation of the Councillor development budget;
- oversee the evaluation of member development opportunities and assess the contribution of member development opportunities towards the Council's corporate objectives;
- ensure that Charter Status for Member Development is maintained and monitor the progress of the implementation of the recommendations from the Charter Assessment.

#### **3. Composition**

The membership of the Group in 2020-21 was as follows:-

Councillor David King, Portfolio for Business and Resources, Chair  
Councillor David Harris  
Councillor Jackie Maclean

Councillor Sam McCarthy  
Councillor Beverley Oxford

The Group has been supported by Richard Clifford, Lead Democratic Services Officer and Matt Evans, Democratic Services Officer

The Group has met on three occasions in 2020-21: 29 September 2020; 25 November 2020 and 30 March 2021.

#### **4. Main Areas of Work**

##### **4.1 The Provision of Member Development**

Details of attendance at member development sessions for 2020-21 is at Appendix 1. The attendance figures are positive and continue to demonstrate a healthy interest in training and development across the Council. Feedback is collected at most sessions and this is largely very positive.

Measurable objectives were established by the Group to help measure attendance and quality of member development sessions and performance against these objectives is shown below. The figures for 2019-20 are also included for comparison and to indicate trends. It is pleasing to note the trend of increasing attendance at member development sessions.

	Target	2019-20	2020-21
Number of Councillors attending one or more Development Session	80%	84%	90%
Number of Councillors attending 5 or more Development Sessions	25%	43%	56%
Number of Development Sessions or Briefings provided for Councillors over the course of a municipal year	10	23	18
Number of Councillors who have completed Leadership Academy programme during the course of the Municipal Year	1	-	-
Percentage of completed feedback forms indicating that development session was worthwhile	75%	92%	92%

The programme of member development has provided briefings to keep members up to date on key Council projects and initiatives. A key element of the member development programme in 2020-21 has been the provision of a series of budget workshops. These arose out of a recommendation from the Policy and Public Initiatives Panel that additional training and briefing on the budget setting process be held for all Councillors. The workshops have provided a forum to enable all Councillors to discuss the budget challenges for 2021/22 and later years. Four

workshops were held over the course of the municipal year and engagement with the sessions was good.

A number of briefings have been held to keep members up to date on “hot topics” and important initiatives by the Council and partners such as Local Government Reorganisation and the E-scooter scheme. Perhaps the most important of these was a briefing from health partners on the roll out of the vaccination programme in January 2021 which was attended by well over half of the Council.

Planning and licensing training has also been provided to ensure that members are kept up to date with developments in these fields and to ensure that there is a wide pool of members able to sit on the Planning and Licensing Committees. The Group was also involved in the planning of the induction process for new councillors elected in May 2021.

There was also a programme of training to prepare members for the move to remote meetings in June 2021. As a consequence of the Covid pandemic development sessions were also moved online and are now held on Microsoft Teams. There are some real advantages to this in that it facilitates attendance without a trip to the Town Hall, and sessions are easily recorded and circulated to those unable to attend. This helps members manage the demands on their time. There is a slight loss of the informality of physical briefing sessions, and they need to be chaired or facilitated slightly more formally than would be the case with a physical briefing. Processes have been developed to help fit in with online sessions: for example an electronic feedback form was developed which can be emailed to members after the event and completed online.

## **4.2 Member Charter Status**

The Council was reaccredited with Charter Status for Elected Member Development in July 2018. Accreditation is for a period of three years, with a “light touch” interim after a period of 18 months. The Council undertook its interim reassessment in January 2020 and was successful and the full reassessment is due later in 2021. Charter Status is important as it demonstrates that the Council’s member development processes are in line with good practice. This provides reassurance to current and potential members, and to other external inspections such as Peer Reviews. It also provides a reassurance to residents that their elected representatives are provided with effective support to enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively.

A key recommendation of the Charter review in 2018 was that member cooperation and understanding, across party lines was crucial to effectiveness and the Member Development Group has continued to support this endeavour, and had supported efforts to shared social and gathering space to be enabled by a change of use of one of the group rooms in the Town Hall (as part of the Building Maintenance Programme).

The Group has been monitoring the work preparing for the reassessment of Charter Status. The key element of this in 2020-21 was the launching and promoting a survey of member training needs. This was undertaken via an online form which invited members to identify priority areas for development in the following themes:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Regulatory
- Partnerships

This is a key initiative in terms of the Charter where member engagement and ensuring training reflects members needs is key. Thirty four Councillors responded to the survey and the results of this will be used to inform the Member Development Programme, which is currently being prepared.

#### **4.3 Member Development Budget and Resources**

The member development budget for 2020 21 was set at £8,000. The budget is split into two elements: a core training budget of £4900 which is used to fund core training with a council wide application such as training on licensing, planning and scrutiny. The remainder of the budget is split between the political groups on the basis of £100 per member. In practical terms, as the group budgets are often underspent, a flexible approach is taken.

Expenditure on the budget 2020-21 is set out below.

Member Charter Reassessment fee, South East Employers	£3000
Licensing training, Cornerstone Barristers	£960
Scrutiny training, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny	£600
Chairing Skills training, Local Government Information Unit	£80
Social Media Training, Local Government Information Unit	£120
Social Media Training, Braintree District Council	£180
Total	£4940
Balance	£3060

In house resources are used to deliver training wherever possible, and external specialist training is only commissioned when necessary and this has contributed to the underspend on the budget. In addition, the Council did not nominate a member to attend Leadership Academy this municipal year, which would normally cost in the region of £1000.

Member development is supported by the Democratic Services Team. Considerable time and effort is put into providing sessions and development by officers across the organisation. The Group wishes to formally record its appreciation for the time and effort that officers and partners put into providing development opportunities for Councillors.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Group considers that a useful and varied programme of development opportunities has been provided for councillors. In view of the Covid 19 pandemic the way member development has been delivered has changed significantly. Member development has also supported changes in working practice resulting from the pandemic, and has helped keep members informed of some of the consequences of the pandemic for the Council and partners. The resources put into member development have provided good value and have contributed towards the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities.

In addition, the Group believes that the Group itself as well as briefings and sessions it arranges are helpful in fostering the cross party understanding that helps the Council as a whole to be effective.