

## **Member Development Group: Report to Cabinet 2023-24**

### **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 consists of the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for member development who acts as Chair of the Group, and a member of each political group. In 2023-24 the Group was chaired by Councillor Alison Jay, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Transformation and Performance.

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 2023-24 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 Councillor Development Charter Status is maintained and monitor the progress of the implementation of the recommendations from the Charter Assessment.

### **3. Composition**

The membership of the Group in 2023-24 was as follows:-

Councillor Alison Jay, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Transformation and Performance , Chair  
 Councillor Michelle Burrows (Liberal Democrat)  
 Councillor Mark Goacher (Green)  
 Councillor David Harris (Labour)  
 Councillor Leigh Tate (Conservative)

The Group has been supported by Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager, Richard Clifford, Democratic Services Manager and Matt Evans, Democratic Services Officer.

The Group has met on four occasions in 2023 -24:

20 September 2023  
 15 November 2023  
 31 January 2024  
 26 March 2024

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

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

Full details of attendance at member development sessions for 2023-24 are available [here](#). The attendance figures are positive and whilst the total number of sessions attended is slightly down from last municipal year, the figures continue to demonstrate a healthy interest in training and development across the Council.

Measurable objectives were established by the Group to help measure the provision of and attendance at member development sessions and performance against these objectives is shown below. The figures for 2022-23 are also included for comparison and to indicate trends.

	Target	2022-23	2023-24
Number of Councillors attending one or more Development Session	80%	96%	98%
Number of Councillors attending 5 or more Development Sessions	25%	78%	75%
Number of Development Sessions or Briefings provided for Councillors over the course of a municipal year	10	36	34
Number of Councillors who have completed Leadership Academy programme during the course of the Municipal Year	1	-	-

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 2023-24 has been the continuation of the Chief Executive briefings and budget workshop programme which were successfully introduced in recent years. The Chief Executive briefings provide a regular opportunity for all members to hear from the Chief Executive on topical issues. The subjects covered have included housing pressures, changes to arrangements for postal votes and proxies, RAAC, the corporate landlord programme and the estate strategy.

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 the Rural Prosperity Fund, Sustainability, Transport and Climate Change and Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Policy. Some of these sessions directly enable members to better help the residents they represent.

A number of Councillors have also taken advantage of external training opportunities offered by national sector organisations such as the Local Government Association. This has included sessions on Preventing Radicalisation, Communications and Political Leadership and Being an Effective Cabinet Member.

The Group also considered and approved a request from the Environment and Sustainability Panel for specialist carbon literacy training. The aim was to enable better understanding of carbon science and to provide panel members with a base of knowledge to enable them to question, make judgements and advise staff about the Council’s work on climate change, as well as being able to assess the views expressed by members of the public speaking under ‘Have Your Say!’ at public meetings on climate change issues. The training was delivered over two sessions in January and February and the sessions were opened out to all councillors with 12 councillors attending one or both sessions.

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 2024.

The Group has also considered the provision of training and development on equality, diversity and inclusion and also on mental health support and as a consequence these issues will be included as key elements of the member development programme in 2024-25.

The Group also examined a number of policy or procedural issues relating to member development to try and improve processes and access to member development. These have included:-

- changes to the nomination process for places at Leadership Academy;
- etiquette at member development sessions.

## **4.2 Councillor Development Charter**

The Group has responsibility for overseeing and monitoring the work in respect of the Councillor Development Charter. The Council was successfully reassessed for the Charter in April 2022. This is the fourth time that the Council has been successfully assessed against the Charter standard.

The Group has been monitoring some of the recommendations made in the last assessment, particularly around the development of a Personal Development Plan process for members, and proposals for such a process were agreed by Cabinet in June 2024. Work to roll out the PDP process is ongoing and has been monitored by the Group.

Looking forward, the Council will be subject to a reassessment in spring of 2025 and overseeing and monitoring the preparations for this will be the focus of the Group's work programme for 2024-25.

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

The member development budget for the current municipal year was set at £8000. The expenditure on the member development budget for this municipal year is £6031, leaving an unspent balance £1969. The budget was used to fund the following:-

Member Charter Status Renewal fee, LGA	£3750
Charing Skills Training, LGIU	£821
Licensing Training, Braintree District Council	£135
Councillor Attendance at LGA Leadership sessions	£450
Carbon Literacy training, Rio	£875

The emphasis on training is to use in house resources where possible, and only commission external specialist training when absolutely 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 right 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's view is that a wide ranging and interesting programme of member development has been provided over the course of the 2023-24 municipal year. The programme of Chief Executive briefings and budget workshops have been particularly welcome and useful in keeping members informed and updated in a period of considerable challenge.