

Member Development Group: Report to Cabinet 2021-22

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 with responsibility for member development. In 2021-22 this was Cllr Paul Dundas, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy.

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 2021-22 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 2021-22 was as follows:-

Councillor Paul Dundas, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Chair
 Councillor Mark Goacher
 Councillor David Harris
 Councillor David King
 Councillor Sue Lissimore
 Councillor Gerard Oxford

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

The Group has met on three occasions in 2021-22: 3 November 2021, 21 December 2021 and 29 March 2022.

4. Main Areas of Work

4.1 The Provision of Member Development

Details of attendance at member development sessions for 2021-22 is at Appendix 1. The attendance figures are positive and have grown since the previous year. This is at least part due to the continued practice of hosting member development sessions and briefing online which makes attendance for Councillors easier. 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 2020-21 are also included for comparison and to indicate trends. The Group has expressed a view that in view of improved performance and the period of time since the objectives were first set that the objectives be revised to make them more rigorous and this is something the Group can look at again in the forthcoming year.

	Target	2020-21	2021-22
Number of Councillors attending one or more Development Session	80%	90%	94%
Number of Councillors attending 5 or more Development Sessions	25%	56%	78%
Number of Development Sessions or Briefings provided for Councillors over the course of a municipal year	10	18	28%
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 2021-22 has been the continuation of budget workshops programme successfully introduced in the previous municipal year. The workshops have provided a forum to enable all Councillors to discuss the budget challenges for 2022-23 and later years. Three workshops were held over the course of the municipal year and engagement with the sessions was high.

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 Vaccine Booster Programme, the Joint Committee for Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community and Permitted Development. Following the tragic murder of David Ames MP an urgent briefing was held on Councillor Safety led by Essex Police 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.

4.2 Councillor Development Charter

The Group oversaw and monitored the work for the successful reassessment of Charter Development Status (previously known as Charter Status for Elected Member Development) in April 2022. This is the fourth time that the Council has been successfully assessed against the Charter standard.

This involved the assessment of the Council’s member development policies and processes against the following criteria:

- There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support;
- The council has a strategic approach to councillor development;
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity.

The assessment is conducted by the submission of portfolio of evidence demonstrating how the Council believes it meets the criteria, which is then followed by an online assessment day where an Assessment Team interview key Councillors and officers. The Group would like it put on record its thanks to all those who met the assessment team in April

The full assessment report is at Appendix 2 but in summary, the Assessors highlighted the following as particular strengths:-

- *Top political and managerial commitment. High level support from leader as the chair of Member Development Group. Key officer support from new Chief Executive and Democratic Services Officers.*

- *Member Development Group is high profile and strategic in focus.*
- *Newly revised Councillor Development Policy and Strategy led by Member Development Group that supports the priorities outlined in the Better Colchester Strategic Plan.*
- *Promotion of the role of councillor via website and active role in schools through Councillor Multi Schools Resources.*
- *Member development programme has high level of participation - 84% via MS Teams. Sessions recorded for future use and resource. Member Development programme is responsive to councillor needs e.g. recent events on modern slavery.*
- *Mandatory training modules are in place around planning/licensing, safeguarding and GDPR.*
- *Budget for member development is sustainable £8k.*
- *Training Needs Analysis carried out in January 2021. High response of 37 councillors and the report to the Member Development Group identified clear priorities and links to the Better Colchester Strategic Plan.*
- *New role profiles in place.*
- *Commitment to leadership development, one councillor per year provided place on LGA Leadership Academy.*
- *Executive Management Team and Cabinet have regular dialogue. Senior Management team regularly attend councillor development sessions.*

Whilst the Group welcomes all these highlighted strengths, in the context of this particular report it particularly noted the comments that the Member Development Group was high profile and strategic in focus, and the recognition of the work it had led on the updated Councillor Development Policy and Strategy.

The Assessors also highlighted the following as areas of continuous improvement

- *To take forward a more focused approach to promoting the role of councillor in order to increase diversity. Utilise LGA Be A Councillor resources and support, look at working with political groups to hold events and have a package to support people in the councillor role including initiatives such as a Carers allowance, Parental Leave Policy etc.*
- *To relaunch, rebadge and have a brand for member development, to raise its profile and to include access to the LGA virtual learning modules.*

- *Look at the values and behaviours of councillors and how it can support more effective collaborative working between councillors, including using social media effectively.*
- *To take forward more joint development between Executive Management Team and Cabinet.*
- *Further develop the role of strategic partners in member development delivery and participation at relevant development events and activities. Include partner involvement in the induction programme following the May 2022 elections.*
- *To develop an approach to Personal Development Plans for Councillor's through conversations via MS Teams to support individual development.*
- *Ensure continued commitment to leadership development to support effective councillor succession planning.*
- *Widen councillor access to LGA leadership resources, particularly the virtual resources.*
- *To commit and take forward Charter Plus commitment and accreditation.*

The Group will look to take forward these issues and they will form the basis of its work programme going forward.

4.3 Member Development Budget and Resources

The expenditure on the member development budget for the 2021-22 municipal year was £1628. This is a considerable underspend on the budget of £8000. 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. For instance this year Licensing training was provided in house rather than commissioning the consultants used previously. 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.

The major expenditure on the budget has been the provision of Scrutiny training which was commissioned from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

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 value of the work of the Group and the member development which it oversees has been demonstrated by the successful assessment for the Councillor Development Charter. Looking forward it will seek to build on this and the recommendations of the Charter Assessment Team to develop processes and policies further to improve the development offer to Councillors.

