

# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

## COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2023

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Member Development Strategy 2023 - 2027</b>			
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	This report seeks approval for a new approach to member training and development and the launch of the Member Development Strategy.			
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<b>Council RESOLVES to:</b> <b>a) Approve and adopt the Member Development Strategy 2023-2027; and</b> <b>b) Approve the draft Induction and Refresher Programme 2024.</b>			
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members were asked to complete a member development survey in March 2023 with the aim to identify the development needs and learning styles of councillors to shape the Member Development Strategy. 21 responses were received (41%) and the results can be found in Appendix C.</li> <li>Throughout the development of the Strategy, consultation has been held with Group Leaders and members of the Member Development Working Group have consulted directly with members of their Groups.</li> <li>A two-week consultation period was held for all members in June 2023 on the draft Member Development Strategy and one response was received providing positive feedback on the Strategy.</li> </ul>			
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<b>Options</b>	Councillors can propose amendments to the Member Development Strategy or choose not to adopt it. Council is asked to approve the approach to the draft Induction and Refresher Programme 2024. Members will be provided with future opportunity to feedback on the content details and timings as the Programme is developed over the course of the next few months.			
<b>Background Papers</b>	None			
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix A – Member Development Strategy Appendix B – Draft Induction and Refresher Programme 2024 Appendix C – Member Development survey results Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment			
<b>Implications (further details at end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

### 1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

1.1 The role of a local councillor is becoming ever more challenging with the skills required by councillors to fulfil their roles becoming more diverse. The council is committed to ensuring that every member has access to the learning and development they need to perform

effectively in their vital role in representing residents and taking decisions on behalf of the community.

1.2 In recognition of this, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge held in March 2022 recommended that the council:

1.2.1 'Create a Member Development Group to coordinate and prioritise a programme of ongoing member training and support new members to find their place in the council'.

1.3 The Member Development Working Group was established later in 2022, and the Group has worked closely with councillors and officers to prepare a strategy to set out the council's approach to learning and development and enhance the skills, knowledge and behaviours of members.

## **2. THE ROLE OF THE MEMBER DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

2.1 The Member Development Working Group (MDWG) is a cross party group and includes councillors of varied positions including committee chairs and vice chairs, Group Leaders, long serving councillors and councillors elected at the last local elections. The Working Group was chaired by Cllr Layfield and membership included Cllrs Brine, Hurst, Robinson, Tucker and Watson. The Working Group was supported by Democratic Services.

2.2 The MDWG reviewed the overall position in respect of learning and development activities for members, consulted with all members through a member development survey (Appendix C) and provided the views and insights of their Groups to develop the strategy.

2.3 The MDWG met on a regular basis and their work focussed on three strands:

2.3.1 The immediate post-election induction period;

2.3.2 Skills training and development required by all members e.g. being able to participate in meetings, chairing meetings, knowing about the council and finding your way around; and

2.3.3 Learning styles and training methods;

2.4 Importantly, the MDWG has developed a member-led strategy. A culmination of the above and the feedback provided by members in the member development survey has shaped the strategy to ensure there is a framework for continuous development and that the programme of activities for the 2024 Induction offers learning in a range of topics and skills across a suitable timeframe.

2.5 The strategy sets out other responsibilities of the MDWG and the work to be undertaken if the strategy is approved is further detailed in this report.

## **3. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

3.1 The overarching aim of the strategy (Appendix A) is to ensure there is support for all members to enable them to acquire sufficient knowledge and a full range of skills to maximise their ability and capacity.

3.2 The objectives of the strategy are to:

3.2.1 Ensure all members have consistent and equal access to training and development opportunities that take into account different learning styles;

3.2.2 Provide support for all members to acquire sufficient knowledge and a full range of skills to fulfil their duties confidently and effectively;

3.2.3 Ensure mechanisms are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the development programme; and

- 3.2.4 Obtain South West Council's Charter Status accreditation for Councillor Development.
- 3.3 The strategy sets out the approach towards continuous development and the Induction and Refresher Programme as detailed in Section 4 below. The strategy also identifies an approach to the following areas of importance:
- 3.4 **Identifying member development needs:** Improving the identification and assessment of training requirement will provide additional governance to the democratic process and ensure that members gain the necessary skills to carry out their roles effectively.
- 3.5 **Meeting development needs:** In recognition of the varying development needs and preferred learning styles, the strategy sets out a range of delivery methods that should be considered including workshops, written resources, and ELearning.
- 3.6 **Feedback and evaluation:** Training providers will be asked to set out the learning objectives and members will be asked to feedback whether they believe the learning objectives have been achieved and whether the training delivery method was appropriate for the topic. This will ensure that the member development offering is continuously improved.
- 3.7 **Performance review:** By putting in place a member development strategy, the council can take a structured approach to measuring the effectiveness of member development and our effectiveness at meeting members training and development needs. The performance measures are included in the strategy.

#### 4. INDUCTION AND REFRESHER PROGRAMME

- 4.1 The next local elections are on Thursday, 2 May 2024. Following the local elections, the council has a responsibility to ensure new councillors are adequately prepared for their new roles and returning councillors are provided with opportunities to refresh and update essential skills.
- 4.2 Balancing the induction process is a challenge, the volume and breadth of content, the length of the process and the ability of councillors to absorb information and integrate their new roles into existing responsibilities all need to be considered.
- 4.3 It is important therefore, for existing councillors to be involved in the development of the Induction programme to ensure the content and format meet the needs and expectations of the target audience. Feedback on the 2021 Induction Process provided through two surveys and other consultation has been thoroughly considered by the MDWG and the approach to the induction process for 2024 is set out in Appendix B.
- 4.4 Significant changes to the Induction Programme for 2024 include:
- 4.4.1 Allowing for a break after the election with only four key induction activities taking place in the first month (Welcome event, Constitution training, Introduction to Council Services, and Media training).
- 4.4.2 Categorising all induction activities into *Strongly Recommended* (essential for newly elected councillors), *Core* (fundamental training for particular committees) and *Mandatory* (to be completed by all members unless specified for certain committees only).
- 4.4.3 Producing a 'Committee Focussed Timetable' to allow members to prioritise training most important to them.
- 4.4.4 30 minute 'Committee Etiquette' sessions will be held before the first Committees following the AGM to ensure newly elected members have the knowledge and confidence to participate in their first committee meeting.

- 4.4.5 The finalised Induction Programme will also include the objectives of each Induction activity so members are aware of what they can expect to learn during the session.
- 4.4.6 The majority of the induction activities will be held face to face and where possible, the new hybrid facilities in the Council Chamber will be used to allow members to join online if they prefer.
- 4.5 The Induction and Refresher Programme is still in development and members will be provided with future opportunity to feedback on content and dates once these have been progressed.
- 4.6 A Councillor Toolkit, similar to the Councillor Handbook provided in 2021 is being developed to sit alongside the Induction and Refresher Programme. The Toolkit will help ensure that elected members have important information available to them not only in the first few months following election but to refer to throughout their term.

## **5. RESOURCES**

- 5.1 The budget for member development is currently set at £6,000 per year. Democratic Services will seek ways to use the budget in the best way to meet the training needs of Councillors. It is envisaged that training will be provided in-house where the council has the necessary skills and capabilities to deliver these. Where training is sourced from external providers we will look for opportunities for cross authority or partner training on a countywide or regional level and look for training support from national/regional course providers such as the LGA or South West Councils.
- 5.2 Each year, the budget and resources that need to be devoted to Member development will be identified as part of the budget setting process. For the year in which a comprehensive induction programme is delivered, a small increase to the budget may be required to ensure we are able to meet the training needs of members in the first year of their term.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

- 6.1 If the strategy should be approved, the MDWG will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategy and the delivery of the programme of learning and development. As set out in the strategy, the member development approach and performance measures will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 6.2 The strategy includes a commitment to work towards the South West Council's Councillor Development Charter. Charter status will underline the continuing importance of training and development for members to ensure future provision will be based on need, quality of training is monitored and training is provided to all members on an equal basis. Work towards the Charter status will begin immediately.
- 6.3 There is still much work to do in preparation for the Induction and Refresher Programme for 2024. As detailed in paragraph 4.5, the draft Induction Programme attached to the strategy sets out the approach to the Member Induction and there is still work to do to confirm the content and dates of training for 2024. Members will be given the opportunity to feedback on the Induction Programme as it develops.
- 6.4 As detailed in paragraph 4.6, the Councillor Toolkit is currently in the initial stages of development and the MDWG will work ensure the Toolkit includes all key and relevant information for councillors to use throughout their term and not just in the first few months of election. Members will be given the opportunity to feedback on the draft Toolkit via the MDWG.
- 6.5 The Council will also be facilitating 'Be a Councillor' events for prospective councillors in September 2023 and again in early 2024. Work on this is already underway and the MDWG

are developing an informative and interactive event that will provide prospective councillors with valuable insight on the role of an elected councillor.

## **7. IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Financial Implications**

The resources available for member development are set out in Section 5 of the report. A small increase in budget will be included in the 2024/25 budget setting process to allow for the funding of the full induction programme post the May 2024 election.

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### **7.2 Legal Implications**

Whilst there are no direct legal implications arising from the report, training and development of Members is an important tool to ensure the delivery of effective democracy and good governance in relation to decision making.

The Local Government Association strongly encourages local authorities to create and adopt member development strategies to facilitate continuing professional development of our local councillors.

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### **7.3 Equality Implications**

An equality impact assessment (Appendix D) has been carried out to ensure the member development offer meets the needs of all elected members.

Equality and Diversity training is mandatory for all councillors. The training offered to councillors will also include reference to the public sector equality duty set out in the Equality Act 2010 which must be considered whenever the council exercises its functions, including decisions taken by members.

### **7.4 Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.