

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	9 May 2022
Title:	Member Training and Development Strategy
Report of:	Malcolm Johnston, Chief Executive
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Prochak
Ward(s):	N/A
Purpose of Report:	To consider the recommended amendments of the Member Development Task Group to the Council's Member Training and Development Strategy for onward recommendation to Council.
Decision Type:	Non-Key
Officer Recommendation(s):	Recommendation to COUNCIL: That the revised Member Training and Development Strategy be approved and adopted.
Reasons for Recommendations:	To ensure that the Member Training and Development Strategy is refreshed to take account of new and emerging practice in the field of Member development in readiness for the all-out elections in May 2023.

Introduction

1. The Council has had a Member Training and Development Strategy in place since 2007 as part of the Council's commitment to Member Training and Development. The Strategy sets out how the Council will develop its elected Members in order to assist both the Council in achieving its aims and priorities in accordance with the Corporate Plan and to assist Members to manage with the increasing demands placed upon them.
2. Since its introduction, the Strategy is reviewed and re-adopted in the year preceding the District Council elections to ensure that the Strategy remains fit for purpose and has taken account of any new or emerging issues.

Review

3. The draft Strategy document, attached at Appendix A, was considered by the Member Development Task Group (MDTG) at its last meeting held on 21 February 2022. Following review, the Strategy has been amended in relation to the following areas:

- all Members during their four-year term and staff receive an appropriate level of carbon literacy awareness training to help achieve the Council's goal of become carbon neutral by 2030;
 - periodic meetings be held with Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs to discuss the training needs of their committees to enable the effective discharge of the committee's functions; and
 - training and development opportunities be shared with parish and town councils, at no additional cost to the Council, wherever appropriate.
4. Essentially, through the Strategy and direction of the MDTG, the Council commits itself to:
- providing an extensive Member Training and Induction Programme that ensures all Members, both new and returned, can fulfil their responsibilities to the local community and provide clear leadership;
 - identifying Members' individual training needs, through a Training Needs Analysis conducted every two years (or as otherwise agreed);
 - providing adequate resources (both internal and external) to meet Members' training and development requirements within a structured programme; and
 - ensuring that access to learning and development takes into account diversity of needs.

Environmental

5. The Strategy now reflects the Council's commitment to do all that it can within its powers, to make Rother District carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions by ensuring that adequate awareness training is provided to Members and staff.
6. As is currently the practice, training and development activities will be delivered in a variety of ways and when and where appropriate this will be remotely, reducing journeys and therefore the carbon footprint to the Town Hall.

Conclusions and Recommendation

7. With District Council elections only some 14 months away, it is vital that the Council has a clear strategy in place for the development of its elected Members. Members and officers need to commit to the expectations that are placed on them through the Strategy in order for the Strategy to be a success and for the potential benefits to the Council and the wider community to be realised.

Risk Management

6. Failure to invest both financial and human resources in the development of elected Members could potentially result in poor decision making and ultimately costly legal challenges.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No
		Legal	No

Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Lisa Cooper, Democratic Services Manager
Email address:	lisa.cooper@rother.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix A – Member Training and Development Strategy
Relevant Previous Minutes:	
Background Papers:	

MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

May 2022



1. CORPORATE COMMITMENT

Rother District Council is committed to developing its elected Members in order to assist both the Council in achieving its aims and priorities in accordance with the Corporate Plan and to assist Members to manage with the increasing demands placed upon them. Member development and training is a joint commitment between Officers and elected Members and by working in partnership, appropriate investment in relevant training and development will be identified and resourced.

It is essential that elected Members are given equal opportunity to develop their knowledge and learn new skills to promote partnership working and community engagement to provide effective leadership to their local communities and lead a modern and progressive District Council of the future.

It is likely that individuals becoming elected Members for the first time, as well as those returned and undertaking new roles and responsibilities, will not necessarily have all the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to be effective. They will need training and development not only to initially acquire these abilities but regular training and development to keep their skills current and relevant to the changing environment and context.

The Council commits itself to elected Member training and development through:

- an extensive Member Training and Induction Programme that ensures all Members, both new and returned can fulfil their responsibilities to the local community and provide clear leadership;
- the identification of Members' individual training needs, through a Training Needs Analysis conducted every two years (or as otherwise agreed);
- the provision of adequate resources (both internal and external) to meet Members' training and development requirements within a structured programme; and
- ensuring that access to learning and development takes into account diversity of needs.

In 2019, Rother District Council declared a climate emergency and pledged to do all that it can within its powers, to make Rother District carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions. To this end, it is essential that all Members and staff receive an appropriate level of carbon literacy awareness training to enable them to help achieve this goal during the four year term of any given administration.

2. RESOURCES

The Council will make available sufficient financial and human resources to meet the essential training and development needs of elected Members to improve and progress the agreed policies and strategies of the Council and the Council's priorities within the Corporate Plan.

3. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT TASK GROUP

The Council has established the Member Development Task Group (MDTG) to:

- lead on Member development activities and on-going arrangements for Member development in conjunction with Democratic Services;
- evaluate the effectiveness of training and development and implement improvements to activities as they are identified;
- champion Member development at Rother District Council;
- analyse Member development needs at a corporate and individual level in the context of the Council's Corporate Plan for the future; and
- encourage and raise awareness of development opportunities to Members.

The controlling administration will appoint a Member Training and Development Champion who will act as Chairman to the MDTG. All Task Group Members will act as training and development "champions" for the Members of their political group and encourage participation in training opportunities.

Each political group serving on the Council will be represented on the MDTG by the Group Leader or in the case of the controlling Group, a representative, if appropriate. To ensure resilience and increased participation by smaller political Groups, all Group Leaders are able to send a substitute, if they are unable to attend. Membership will also include two newly elected Members following the ordinary elections held every four years together with any independent Members who are not part of a Group.

Rother District Council will nominate an Officer to be the single point of contact for training and development who will work closely with the Member Development Champion and the Corporate Management Team / Heads of Service.

The MDTG will have responsibility for approving the training and development programme and for providing a steer for future learning and development requirements.

4. INDUCTION PROGRAMME

A comprehensive induction programme will be provided for all Members following the District Council elections and to those Members elected at by-elections. Notification of key dates will be sent to all candidates prior to the election. The induction programme will be developed and monitored by the MDTG and will encompass the following:

- knowledge based learning;
- skills based learning (including IT / Social Media);
- community issues (including community leadership and planning, public consultation, dealing with complaints);
- regulatory functions – planning and licensing; and
- scrutiny process and specific skills required for that function.

An Officer buddy from Democratic Services will be allocated as a contact point to assist newly elected Members until they are familiar with the way in which the Council operates and are able to find their way around. Political groups will also be encouraged to allocate Member buddies/mentors for all newly elected Councillors within their Groups.

5. IDENTIFICATION OF MEMBERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

All Members will be required to actively participate and ensure that training and development needs are identified, through the completion of a Training Needs Analysis every two years (years 1 and 3 of the 4-year cycle), unless otherwise determined by the MDTG. This structured process will identify individual development needs and enable the appropriate investment of resources in the training and development of all Members.

The Council has agreed that those Members appointed to a regulatory committee (Planning or Licensing and General Purposes) will need to undertake an annual mandatory training session, to the satisfaction of the relevant Head of Service, prior to taking an active part in the decision-making processes of these committees. The MDTG has also determined that all Members should attend an equality and diversity training session within their term of office.

The majority of training and development opportunities will be relevant to all Members and the requirement can arise from a number of sources, including:

- new legislation or obligations placed on the Council;
- the Council's strategic priorities;
- major policy changes or new initiatives by the Council;
- requests from Members for knowledge-based training to provide them with a more detailed knowledge base on particular services; and
- identified skills-based training (e.g. scrutiny skills).

Periodic meetings will also be held with Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs to discuss the training needs of their committees to enable the effective discharge of the committee's functions.

There will be other training that will be more relevant to some Members due to the different roles of Members or because of the different competency levels of Members in particular areas. This could include, for example, interview skills for Cabinet Members, Chairmanship skills for Chairs / Vice-Chairs and training for opposition Members.

As far as possible, training will take account of Members' current and prospective future roles and responsibilities so they are prepared for current challenges as well as those they may face in the future. Members will also be encouraged to complete a Diversity Questionnaire which will assist the MDTG to ensure equal access to learning and development opportunities are available to all.

6. MEETING MEMBERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The Council will endeavour to meet Members' training and development needs in the way that is most appropriate for them.

This may be through an “off the shelf” programme, course or seminar provided by an external organisation; it may be by way of a tailor made programme developed for the Council on a specific topic; or it may be provided in-house by Council Officers, with or without the help of an external consultant. Where possible, copies of any training materials circulated at training events will be made available electronically on the Members’ Area of the website and all Members will be advised of their availability.

Members are encouraged to attend external training events or conferences that are of relevance to their role and should contact their Group Leader or the Democratic Services Manager in the first instance regarding attendance. Following attendance at an external training event or conference Members will be required to write a report on the event and provide copies of any learning materials, if available. These will be published in the Members’ Bulletin and copies will be made available electronically on the Members’ Area of the website.

Wherever appropriate, consideration will be given to the opportunity to promote joint development activities with other local authorities and partner organisations, including the joint procurement of such development activities. Wherever appropriate, training and development opportunities will be shared with parish and town councils, where this can be done at no additional cost to the Rother District Council.

7. EVALUATION

The Council is committed to obtaining feedback on the effectiveness of training and development undertaken and the MDTG use the results in planning future programmes. Members will be required to complete an evaluation form and in addition provide feedback on how the skills/knowledge gained has been of benefit to them and the Council.

8. REPORTING ON PROGRESS

All Members will be kept informed of Member training progress and evaluation through the minutes of the MDTG, which are published on the Intranet of Mod-Gov on the website as well as highlighted within the Members’ Bulletin. The MDTG also reports annually to full Council on training and development activity in general.

Malcolm Johnston
Chief Executive

Councillor Doug Oliver
Leader of the Council