

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Council
Date	-	16 May 2022
Report of the	-	Member Development Task Group
Subject	-	Annual Report of the Member Development Task Group

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

Introduction

1. The Member Development Task Group (MDTG) provides a structured and on-going Member-led approach to Member training and development. This report provides Members with an annual update on Member Training and Development issues since May 2021.
2. The Membership of the MDTG is usually fixed for the life of the Council and is made up of all Group Leaders, the majority Group Leader's Representative, the Member Training and Development Champion, two newly elected Members from the last elections (2019) and any independent (non-Group Members).
3. The current membership is confirmed as: Councillors Prochak (Member Training and Development Champion and Chairman), Bayliss (Labour Group Leader), Mrs Cook (newly elected 2019 Member), Dixon (Liberal Democrat Group Leader), Oliver (Independent Group Leader), Stevens (Conservative Group representative) and Timpe (newly elected 2019 Member). All Group Leaders are able to send a substitute if they are unable to attend and Councillor Gray has attended once during the past year as a substitute for Councillor Dixon.
4. All Members are encouraged to contact their respective representatives if they have any training and development issues to be brought to the attention of the MDTG.
5. The MDTG has met three times since the last annual report. The minutes arising from the meetings are highlighted within the Members' Bulletin e-zine and published on the website (extranet).
6. At this stage of the life of the Council, the initial training and development needs of Members, particularly newly elected Members, have been met and consequently training and development activity reduces. However there has continued to be a variety of training and development activities available to Members during the past 12 months.
7. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the majority of training sessions have also been delivered on-line via MS Teams. Whilst there have been benefits to receiving training on-line, the networking opportunity that face-to-face sessions bring has been lost and facilitators are now being requested to introduce an "ice-breaker" into the beginning of training and development sessions, where appropriate.

Member Training Programme 2021

8. This past year has seen the continuation of the Member Training Programme identified through the initial and revised Training Needs Analysis (TNA) undertaken in June 2019 and September/October 2020 respectively. As well as concentrating on essential service-related training and personal skills, more wide-ranging development / learning opportunities have included Carbon Literacy (shared with officers), Public Speaking Skills, Communications and Scrutiny Skills training.
9. A full list of the development activities that have been offered to Members during the last year is available on the Members' Area of the website as well as the feedback received on these sessions, where appropriate.
10. Where possible and appropriate, relevant training and development opportunities have been offered to the parish and town councils, particularly with regard to planning matters.

Partnership Working

11. There has been one opportunity over the past year for partnership working with Member training and development. The Annual (Mandatory) Licensing Training was shared with Wealden District Council. Sharing sessions continues to help reduce the impact on the Council's Member Training budget and enables the Council to recoup costs where applicable.

Finance

12. The Council continues to allocate both human and financial resources to Member Development and currently has a Member training budget of £15,000 per annum. A higher expenditure is usual in years 1 and 2 with less activity in years 3 and 4. Any underspent budget is not automatically carried forward year-on-year.
13. In order to ensure value for money (vfm) it is essential that once Members have requested a place on a training session that the date is reserved, particularly where an external consultant or other additional expenditure such as transport is involved; at the request of the MDTG, the cost of training per head is now advised to Members at the time that places are offered.
14. There have been occasions during the last year where the overall vfm has been compromised when the number Members have reduced due to last minute drop outs – it is acknowledged that there are occasions (sickness, family crisis etc.) which are unavoidable.

Evaluation

15. In accordance with the Council's Member Training and Development Strategy, the Council is committed to obtaining feedback on the effectiveness of training and development undertaken and Members are 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.

16. The MDTG consider feedback on all training and development activities at the next available meeting and unfortunately, as a result of predominantly on-line training sessions the evaluation return rate has significantly deteriorated. This was despite an email requesting feedback be sent to Members directly after the session with a heading stipulating "Training Feedback Needed". It is anticipated that face-to-face training sessions will increase, therefore enabling feedback to be more easily obtained.

Member Training and Development Attendance Statistics

17. The MDTG continues to receive an update at each meeting on the number of training events each Member has attended since the elections in May 2019; this information is primarily for use by the Group Leaders and the most recent update is detailed below:

Courtel, Paul – 64	Barnes, John – 28
Gray, Polly – 64	Bayliss, Christine – 25
Timpe, Hazel – 59	Norton, Howard – 24
Langlands, Lynn – 58	Field, Kathryn – 22
Mier, Andrew – 58	Ganly, Tony – 22
Prochak, Sue – 55	Curtis, Gary – 18
Drayson, Brian – 51	Dixon, Kevin – 18
Madeley, Chris – 51	Jeeawon, Ashan – 15
Errington, Sarah – 50	Earl-Williams, Deirdre – 14
Coleman, Sam – 46	Browne, Graham – 12
Harmer, Kathy – 43	Kirby-Green, Eleanor – 10
Oliver, Doug – 41	Bird, Roger – 7
Cook, Vikki – 40	Mooney, Martin – 6
Stevens, Gennette – 40	Osborne, Paul – 6
Thomas, Richard – 39	Carroll, James – 5
Vine-Hall, Jonathan – 38	* Hacking, Lizzie – 4
Byrne, Terry – 35	Maynard, Carl – 2
Brewerton, Jay – 34	Clark, Charles – 1
Barnes, Mary – 31	

* elected 6 May 2021.

18. Training and Development is not compulsory, except for those Members serving on the Council's regulatory committees; each Member has very specific training and development requirements, based on their own personal circumstances which will include experience, role (both internal and external to Rother), interests, availability and length of service as a Councillor.
19. Those Members who had attended five or fewer sessions were contacted to ascertain whether there were any specific reasons why they were not participating in training. One responded stating that as a long-standing experienced Member they felt they did not require additional training.
20. Training events can be uploaded to the ModGov system and displayed on each Councillors individual website page. This will be instigated from May 2023.

Terms of Reference

21. The MDTG undertook a review of the current Terms of Reference (ToR) and agreed that the current arrangements worked well. The ToR will be reviewed by the new MDTG at its first meeting in June/July 2023.

The Next 12 Months

22. In looking ahead, historically, during last 12 months of a Council Term, the training requirements reduce as a result of Members feeling more confident in their role; Members also start to look ahead and contemplate whether they will be standing for re-election in 2023 and this will also have an influence on their training needs. The training and development offer focuses on the mandatory training, licensing, planning and other function specific training such as Treasury Management.
23. The MDTG's Work Programme for 2022/23 is full and will be focusing on preparing for the 2023 elections, including amongst other matters, the pre-election event to be held on Monday 14 November 2022, considering and formulating the Member Induction Programme, reviewing and updating various guides (Becoming a Rother District Councillor, Rural and Bexhill Members), considering Member Induction Packs, IT Provision for 2023 and Councillor Role Profiles. All Members will be contacted for contributions and comment on these issues as and when appropriate / timely.

Conclusions

24. Our move to on-line meetings and training in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has been embraced by officers, Councillors and professional trainers alike and I would like to thank all those involved. With expert officer support, our meetings are professional and proficient, and I congratulate all who have risen to this challenge. Attendance is much easier if on TEAMS and we will continue to use 'virtual' meetings as appropriate. However, there have been training sessions which can only work well in a 'live' event. This limits the number of participants, but feedback from such sessions has been extremely positive.
25. At this stage of our term of office, Councillors have a greater knowledge and experience of the business and procedures of the Council. Therefore, the training needs have changed with Members appreciating much more Rother specific focus, rather than off-the-shelf content provided by external trainers. Having said that, some Members have benefitted from being given a wider picture in specific webinar training given for example, by the Local Government Association. Any feedback reports from Members are greatly appreciated.
26. We are still required to provide the mandatory annual training for licensing and planning, together with any other service specific training, requirements as a result of service changes, new legislation etc. An ambition is to source online training for the mandatory training, similar to that used for data protection. The other most important aim is to offer carbon literacy training across the whole of the organisation.

27. I would like to thank Democratic Services staff for supporting this ongoing programme so well, in particular Julie Hollands. There are also very welcome initiatives and suggestions from Chairs of Committees. Perhaps involvement of all Chairs would be useful in planning training sessions when we are half way through a term of office.
28. The one aspect of Member development which we should be proud of is reaching out to our parish and town councils by inviting them to participate in relevant training sessions and recording any which would be useful to those who could not attend. This is particularly relevant for our fledgling Bexhill Town Council.
29. I am pleased to take this opportunity also to thank formally my fellow Task Group Members, Councillors Bayliss, Cook, Dixon (Gray), Oliver, Stevens and Timpe for the contribution they have made over the past year and the officer support that is provided both directly by Democratic Services, the Transformation Team and indirectly through all staff involved in guiding and providing assistance to Members in a number of ways.

Councillor Prochak
Chairman of the Member Development Task Group