

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Council
Date	-	24 May 2023
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 the last annual update on Member Training and Development issues from the current MDTG.
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 all meetings of the MDTG 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. Despite being in the last full year of the life of this Council, there has remained a steady provision of Member Training and Development opportunities for Members, including annual mandatory training.

Member Induction Programme 2023

7. Since October of last year, in conjunction with the Senior Leadership Team, the MDTG has worked on the formulation of the Member Induction Programme 2023, including the Induction Day itself. The Programme has

been compiled by drawing on the feedback received from both Members and officers following the 2019 Induction Programme.

8. The MDTG is confident that the Programme which is currently being put in place will meet the needs of the new Council by providing a comprehensive Induction Programme, at a reasonable pace.
9. The Programme will be reviewed and monitored by the MDTG and it is hoped that the approach and initiatives will be welcomed by both new and returned Members. It is vital that returned Members are active participants in the induction training for a number of reasons: to reinforce this Council's commitment to Member Training and Development; to encourage and help shared learning with fellow newly elected Members; and to further increase their own knowledge as new legislation and initiatives change the face of local government and service delivery.

Pre-Election Event

10. On 14 November 2022, the Council held its third pre-election event which forms part of the Council's strategy in attracting new Members to stand for election. Following a media campaign 25 delegates pre-registered to attend, 21 (four did not pre-register) attended in person and one person attended remotely.
11. The programme for the evening included: a welcome and introduction session by the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive; a Panel of current serving Councillors who shared their experiences, including specific formal roles and work in their local areas; a brief overview of member development and training by the Democratic Services Manager; a question and answer session; and an informal session at the end for networking with Councillors, officers and political agents.
12. General feedback received showed that overall the event was well-received, with the majority of attendees indicating that they would be standing for election in May.

Training and Development Programme

13. Historically, during the last year of a four year term leading up to the elections, training and development activity is kept to a minimum. This tends to be due to a number of reasons including Members feeling more confident in their role and knowledge due to the earlier intensive training activity, training fatigue and a re-focus towards re-election and whether or not to re-stand.
14. This last year has been no exception with training focusing on on-going (mandatory) regulatory training (planning and licensing), finance and Treasury Management (mandatory for Audit and Standards Committee Members).
15. The Members' Learning Day has also proven to be popular with content including a progress overview on the Corporate Plan and presentations on the Council's Housing Needs and Solutions (including homelessness demand, asylum, refugee and immigration) and update on Environmental Enforcement and Exporting Fish to Europe, as well as questions to the Senior Leadership Team.

16. The Deputy Chief Executive has also introduced a series of monthly Member Briefing sessions which have also proved very popular and have included the following topics: the Town Hall Renaissance Project, Emergency Planning, Barnhorn Green Health and Employment Project, the Elections Act 2022, the Draft Local Plan, Financial Stability Programme and Local Government Finance Settlement, Levelling-Up Funding and Council Tax and Benefits Information.
17. Each appropriate training and development event held in 2022-23 has been evaluated on the day by participants and a summary of the results have been monitored and considered by the MDTG and published on the website (extranet).
18. Members can also benefit from attending conferences and other external events where they relate to their areas of interest or responsibility and assist in meeting the Council's corporate objectives, as well as individuals' personal development. Members are requested to contact their Group Leaders in the first instance and then the Member Training Champion if they wish to attend an external conference / event.
19. During this past year, Members have attended external events on finance, menopause, climate emergency, biodiversity net gain, neighbourhood approach to decarbonising buildings and transport, economic growth, WMF policy, digitalisation, photographic voter identification / raising awareness and next steps for mental health in England.

Partnership Working

20. 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

21. 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.
22. In light of potential budget reductions and in order to ensure value for money 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.
23. The MDTG receive routine budget reports throughout the year and, whilst it is evident that in most years the budget is not spent, the majority of spend will be within the first two years of a Council. The initial Member Induction Programme that is being put in place already includes a number of training

sessions that will be provided by external sources and this will involve a much heavier call on the budget than in subsequent years.

Evaluation

24. 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.
25. 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. As a result of the return to face-to-face training sessions, feedback rates have increased.

Member Training and Development Attendance Statistics

26. 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:

Gray, Polly – 70
Courtel, Paul – 69
Timpe, Hazel – 64
Langlands, Lynn – 63
Mier, Andrew – 62
Prochak, Sue – 59
Madeley, Chris – 57
Drayson, Brian – 55
Errington, Sarah – 53
Coleman, Sam – 48
Harmer, Kathy – 45
Oliver, Doug – 43
Vine-Hall, Jonathan – 43
Cook, Vikki – 42
Stevens, Gennette – 42
Thomas, Richard – 42
Byrne, Terry – 37
Barnes, Mary – 35
Brewerton, Jay – 34

Barnes, John – 33
Bayliss, Christine – 27
Norton, Howard – 26
Ganly, Tony – 25
Field, Kathryn – 24
Curtis, Gary – 21
Dixon, Kevin – 19
Jeeawon, Ashan – 15
Earl-Williams, Deirdre – 14
Browne, Graham – 13
Kirby-Green, Eleanor – 13
***Bird, Roger – 8
Osborne, Paul – 8
Mooney, Martin – 6
Carroll, James – 6
Maynard, Carl – 6
* Hacking, Lizzie – 5
** Gordon, Neil – 2
Clark, Charles – 1

* elected 6 May 2021

** elected 16 June 2022

*** resigned 13 December 2022

27. 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.

28. 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.
29. From May 2023, training events attended by Councillors will be uploaded to the ModGov system and displayed on each Councillors' individual website page.

Terms of Reference

30. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed by the new MDTG at its first meeting in July 2023.

Conclusions

31. This last civic year in the four-year cycle, has seen the customary reduction in Member Training and Development, with only mandatory and other essential training taking place. As mentioned, some Members have taken advantage of the wide range of free Local Government Association virtual training sessions, chosen because they have a particular interest or usefulness to them in their Council work.
32. The next 12 months will be a busy and challenging time for the new MDTG; the all-out district elections in May will no doubt see several Councillors not seeking re-election, and this, together with the unpredictable election results, could result in many new Councillors being elected. As mentioned, a successful pre-election event has already been held.
33. The need to ensure that Councillors therefore engage in a high quality, relevant and robust Member Training and Development Programme is therefore even more crucial than ever. The MDTG will be monitoring and evaluating the on-going Member Induction Programme and agreeing the Member Training Programme, based on the results of the Training Needs Analysis for the following 18 months after the initial induction period.
34. 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. The involvement of all Chairs would be useful in planning training sessions when we are half way through a term of office. Training particularly about the Council's planning role is always on going but will be needed with the emergence of the new Local Plan. We should also consider a recommendation from an external trainer that all Members participate in basic planning training.
35. 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