

# **West Sussex County Council**

## **Member Development Strategy**

### **Introduction**

West Sussex County Council understands the importance of ensuring that elected members are effectively supported to lead the Council to achieve the vision and objectives laid out in the West Sussex Plan to deliver high quality services that improve the lives of residents.

The Council is committed to providing members with the right learning and development opportunities that will enable them to fulfil their strategic and local roles and carry out their roles effectively and confidently. It is also committed to provide fair and equitable learning opportunities for all members.

This Member Development Strategy provides the structure for councillor learning and development. It underpins and sets out the support provided to them to ensure their training reflects both their personal needs and organisational requirements.

This Strategy recognises the relationship between local communities, the Council and the government and the significance of the role that elected representatives play in:

- being effective leaders and decision makers;
- scrutiny, governance and non-executive functions;
- the Council's commitment to its residents and understanding of local and community issues;
- how regional and national issues and government policy affecting West Sussex might be influenced;
- matters such as sustainability and the environment;
- the work of successful partnerships, and
- ensuring the Council provides value for money.

### **Member Development Group**

West Sussex County Council has a well-established member-led, cross-party Member Development Group (MDG), which is a sub-group of the Governance Committee. MDG is the custodian of all aspects of the member role and has responsibility for managing the member development process.

This includes the programme of planned all-member sessions that runs over the municipal year, ad-hoc development events and projects and an induction programme following elections every four years or following by-elections.

MDG is also responsible for wider development activities including overseeing the member development budget, the Charter for Elected Member Development, feedback on various aspects of the member role, role profiles and promotion the member role, specific policies relating to support provided to members and member health, wellbeing and safety.

## Member Induction Programme

The Council offers a structured induction programme which follows the local elections every four years. This Member Induction Programme is developed and overseen by MDG. There are four main elements to the programme:

1. **Pre-election period** (prior to the date of the local elections) – information and support made available to people considering standing for election and to candidates. Personal welcome and information is provided at the count to those who are elected.
2. **Core Induction** (from day after the election and up 3 months after) – key information is provided including resources and training for new and returning members. Each member will have a buddy from within Democratic Services to help with induction and signposting to any further advice or support needed.
3. **Specific member role training** (ongoing from after the election) – members will be supported and provided with training in their specific roles, e.g. cabinet, committees, outside bodies, County Local Committees (CLCs).
4. **Visits** – visits to key strategic services will be offered to all members; other opportunities to visit services will be considered on a locality basis, as well according to specific needs, e.g. visits may be arranged for certain committees.

A review of the Induction Programme will be undertaken. MDG will seek the views of members regarding the topics and content of induction sessions and information provided in order to ensure that the future programme best fits the needs of both newly elected and returning members.

Members who are elected at by-elections will be supported with an individual induction package.

## Annual Member Development Programme

Following the initial three-month Induction Programme, the Council's Member Development Programme will pick-up and run until end of the municipal year. In non-election years the Council will schedule in 12 member development dates per year (up to 24 member development sessions). Additional dates may sometimes be offered as need arises.

The content of the member development sessions can broadly categorised as follows:

- Corporate priorities, including those within the West Sussex Plan
- Service improvement
- Policy and strategy development
- Major contract renewal
- Engagement in the budget process and understanding of local government finance
- Members' knowledge base - understanding the Council's services through updates, briefings and engagement
- Key and personal skills (e.g. chairmanship, questioning, council procedures, safeguarding)

- Values and culture (e.g. Code of Conduct, unconscious bias)

Periodically, some of the events on offer will be facilitated by experts from external organisations, e.g. chairmanship skills, corporate parenting training.

Topics and prioritisation for member development events is approved by MDG.

Member development events are formally announced to members around four to six weeks ahead of each event. Information about the Member Development Programme will be made available on the [Member Development Sessions page on the Mine](#) (online Members' Information Network – for further details, see 'Resources' below), this will include the topic, timings and any papers and presentations for each event.

## **Other Training**

### *External Training and Conferences*

Where appropriate and approved by the relevant Group Leader a Cabinet Member or relevant Committee Chairman, members can access opportunities for learning outside the Council which includes attending conferences and external training courses. There is a dedicated budget for member training, which includes the costs for such external events/courses. This is overseen by MDG.

### *Online Learning*

Members are able to access a range of online learning courses through the Council's own learning and development website and also via the Local Government Association (LGA). Online learning complements face-to-face learning and provides additional opportunities that are not available in the annual member development programme, for example, technical modules for IT skills or various courses on cultural values and personal development.

### *Role-Specific Training*

Members are supported with training that meets the specific needs of their role, where required, for example:

- Cabinet Members will be provided with training that is appropriate to the position, e.g. advanced media training, decision making process.
- Chairmen and Vice-chairman of County Council Committees will be offered priority places on chairmanship skills workshops.
- Members of quasi-judicial committees such as Planning Committee, Rights of Way Committee and Staff Appeals Panel will receive training in legislation and policies pertinent to the role.
- Appropriate training will be provided for all roles on various committees and panels, for example scrutiny, questioning skills.

### *Local Role*

All councillors are members of a County Local Committee (CLC), which are designed to ensure that local people can help shape the services provided by

the County Council and involve local residents in decision making. Each CLC makes a commitment to providing members with the opportunity shape the way it works and understand the issues that are specific to the locality. Training on the local community role of members is provided as part of the Induction Programme. CLCs host an area-based member development session at least once per electoral term which provides local members with information about their division, e.g. data on public health, and a chance to meet local officers, e.g. the Area Highways Manager.

### *Visits*

From time to time, members will be offered the chance to visit services provided by the Council or by partner organisations. Such visits can enhance members' understanding of how Council services are provided and the specific needs and challenges or successes of an individual service.

### *Leadership Development*

Leadership development is supported via leadership development programmes for example the LGA's Leadership Academy. This applies to the Executive and to leaders of opposition groups. Coaching and mentoring support is also available.

## **Personal Development Records**

A record of each member's personal development for the electoral period will be available, enabling members to keep a track of the learning they have undertaken including role-specific training, online learning, and events attended. Members will also be supported by Democratic Services on a regular basis to identify their individual training needs and gaps in learning and ways to fill these.

## **Learning and Data Resources**

The Council offers numerous sources of information and data. Some is provided only to members because it relates specifically to their role as a councillor. Other information may be more generally available but is helpful to members in carrying out the role on a day-to-day basis and also helps to enhance members' knowledge of Council services and provision.

### *The Mine*

Members are provided with access to the Mine (Members' Information Network) which is a dedicated intranet site for members containing a wide range of essential and useful information – including induction materials - in the form of documents or weblinks, about all aspects of the member role and how the Council functions. The Mine includes a relevant links for induction and also member development (see 'Annual Member Development Programme' above).

### *Members' Essential Information Pack*

Upon election, both new and returning members will be provided with access to an online pack of essential information, allowing members to easily identify the

information that is relevant their questions at the time. The layout of information is arranged as follows, and reflects information found on the Mine:

- **About You** – e.g. member allowances; support available, Code of Conduct and members interests, IT, details of Council buildings, etc.
- **About West Sussex County Council** – corporate plan, senior management structure, key contacts, overview of how the Council works, etc.
- **Strategic Role** – key committees and panels, overview of strategic roles.
- **Your local role** – County Local Committees, key local contacts, ways of working, etc.

### *Mapping Tools*

The Council uses a number of mapping tools. The following are examples of mapping tools which members find particularly helpful to them in their local role:

**LocalView Fusion** – Current and historic data including community information, education, social care and health, council (councillors and wards), Ordnance Survey information and postcodes, environment, planning, roads and transport including Traffic Regulation Orders, public rights of way, and more.

**Roadworks Map** – Up-to-date information about roadworks being carried out across West Sussex.

### *About West Sussex*

There are a number of sources of information and statistics about numerous aspects of life in West Sussex, including population, economy, housing, health and wellbeing and the environment and sustainability available publicly on the County Council website, including [census and population information](#) and [reports and data on a range of other statistics](#) such as health, school performance, road traffic incidents, employment trends, care data, air quality, etc.

## **Role of Democratic Services**

Democratic Services officers facilitate the provision of learning and development opportunities for members, as follows:

- Liaison with Council services and external trainers to ensure the content and delivery of in-house training events and briefings meets their objectives and the needs of members and the organisation
- Provision of logistical arrangements for all in-house events.
- Searches for and suggestions of external events or conferences that may enhance a member's role or understanding, and the booking of such events.
- Promotion of appropriate on-line learning.
- Management of all feedback, surveys and subsequent reports, and the implementation of relevant outcomes.
- Support to MDG.



### *Democratic Services Buddy*

New members will be allocated a buddy from Democratic Services. Buddies will provide help with IT and, in the first few weeks, are a point of contact for general queries whilst new members find their feet.

### **Members' IT**

The Council understands that effective IT is vital to members in enabling them to carry out their role, especially when working remotely. The IT resources offered by the Council benefits members in terms of learning and development by enabling them to access information easily and engage with and keep up-to-date with the work of the Council.

#### *IT Kit and Software*

The County Council will provide each member with a touch-screen laptop which, as well as enabling them to carry out the day to day role, provides the necessary access to the Mine and enables access to the relevant documents and weblinks – including on-line evaluation tools – that are used in training.

Members IT uses 'Skype for Business' which is part of the software on the laptop. As well as a telephone system it includes an internal instant messaging service – to anyone on the West Sussex County Council network – and Skype face-to-face calls.

The Council uses Mod.Gov, a content management system for committee papers and recording and reporting of decisions. During 2020, the Council intends to implement an app for Mod.Gov which will be available to members, allowing paperless access to agendas, reports and decision documents.

#### *IT Training*

The County Council will offer members training sessions in IT basics and IT security and will offer further training if required.

A dedicated IT helpline is available for members.

#### *Video-conferencing*

The County Council has a video-conferencing facility with a suite of two linked meeting rooms, one at County Hall in Chichester and the other at County Hall North in Horsham. This facility is available for informal member-led meetings. Video-conferencing can also link to Skype allowing members at multiple locations to attend a meeting. This convenient facility can help members to maximise their time and reduce their travel.

#### *Webcasts of Meetings*

Many of the Council's formal meetings held are webcast, meaning that they are available to view live on-line – and via an archive for period of time after each meeting. Meetings which are webcast include County Council meetings (full

Council meetings), scrutiny committees and Planning Committee. This can be a useful source of information for all members.

## **Support**

The Council provides some facilities that may enable members to find it easier to balance their role and personal life; where applicable this support may help members to more easily and better access the learning opportunities on offer, for example, allowances can be claimed for care of dependants to allow a member to attend training sessions.

### *Employee Assistance Programme*

Members are able to access the [Employee Assistance Programme](#), a free, confidential service delivered by Health Assured, an independent external organisation, which can help deal with any personal or professional problems effecting home life or work life, health and general wellbeing; this includes access to a counselling service.

### *Member Policies*

The Council will provide a suite of policies reflecting the specific role that members carry out, these include absence and caring and parental leave; the latter being particularly useful in relation to supporting members with dependants to be able to attend meetings and training events.

### *Reasonable Adjustments*

The Council will make reasonable adjustments to help the needs of members who may need additional support or aids to carry out their role.

## **Member Training Budget**

The Council has a dedicated budget for member learning and development which covers the costs associated with providing in-house learning (including in-house courses run by external trainers) and attendance at external events and conferences.

The budget is managed on a day-to-day basis by Democratic Services.

MDG reviews the member training budget on an annual basis, and will make recommendations where appropriate.

## **Member Engagement to Improve Learning and Development**

The Council regularly engages the wider-membership in improving learning and development opportunities and understanding members' needs. The ways in which this is done include:

### *Member Feedback*

Members are encouraged to give feedback on the content, delivery and usefulness of each member development event, with the aim of ensuring that services provide member development sessions that best support members' needs and their understanding of the Council's work. An on-line evaluation tool is used and members will be provided with links to complete evaluations following each member development event.

Results of feedback from member development events are assessed by MDG and any recommendations reported to Governance Committee. And, where applicable, any outcomes will be advised to the wider membership.

### *Member Surveys*

From time to time the Council will seek members' opinions on matters that affect them and the role, for example, the timing and content of member development events, the member remuneration package or changes to how committees work. This is carried out using an access-restricted survey using the Council's 'Have Your Say' consultation service.

The Council seeks the views of members about the content and usefulness of the Council's induction programme, via the means of a survey.

Following any member survey, results will be considered by MDG and recommendations and changes reported to Governance Committee and thence to the wider membership.

## **Review of Member Learning Development**

MDG provides regular update reports to Governance Committee. This includes proposals for member development/training topics and an overview of upcoming events, key feedback from members and plans for and progress of ad-hoc training and projects. In this way Governance Committee monitors and is able to influence the member development programme.

In order to assess both the costs and benefits of member learning and development, MDG annually evaluates the success of the overall member development programme for each municipal year including external training and ad-hoc projects, as well as reviewing the provision and allocation of the member development budget. Recommendations will be made and considered by Governance Committee to be incorporated into future planning.

## **Review of Member Development Strategy**

MDG will review this Member Development Strategy at least once every electoral term, to ensure that it is current and fit for purpose. Recommendations following each review will be considered by Governance Committee to ensure robust scrutiny.

## **Councillor Development Charter**

In 2019, the Council made a commitment to undertaking [the South-East Employers Councillor Development Charter](#) (which is supported by the LGA). The Charter provides a robust, structured framework designed to help the authority enhance member development, with three essential 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 councillor capacity.

The Council was awarded 3-year Charter status in November 2020.