KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Member Development Sub-Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 11 February 2025.

PRESENT: Mr D Jeffrey (Chair), Mr N Baker, Mr A Kennedy, Rich Lehmann, Mr J Meade and Mr J A Kite, MBE

IN ATTENDANCE VIRTUALLY: Ms M Dawkins

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs K Goldsmith (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Operations)), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Ms P Blackburn-Clarke (Delivery Manager - Engagement & Consultation) and Mr K Smith (Customer Feedback Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

7. Apologies
(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Ms Dawkins who was in attendance virtually.

8. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

No declarations were received.

9. Minutes of the meeting held on 10.12.24
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

10. Member iCasework portal – demonstration
(Item 4)

Pascale Blackburn-Clarke, Delivery Manager - Engagement & Consultation, Kevin Smith, Customer Feedback Manager and Benjamin Watts, General Counsel were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Blackburn-Clarke demonstrated the iCasework Portal to the Committee.

2. Once live, Members would be able to log constituent enquiries through the iCasework Portal. The enquiries would be investigated by the Customer Feedback Team. Members could choose to respond to the constituent directly or delegate the response to the team.

3. Benefits of the Portal included:

    a. A single point of entry, reducing the risk that enquiries get lost.

    b. Members being able to check the status of their individual enquiries.

    c. Monitoring response times.

    d. Enquiries getting to the right place for an answer more quickly.

4. The options for signing into the Portal included a username and password (to be used from any device) or the Member's KCC log in (from a KCC device only).

5. The Committee asked a number of questions and made comments which included the following:

    a. The form was the same as used for all complaints, including from the public. Therefore it was not possible to adapt the form for Member use.

    b. The content of inquires obtained from social media could be copied and pasted into the Portal. It was also possible to attach files.

    c. Constituents did not always provide a first and last name when asking questions which would make it difficult to complete the form. Ms. Blackburn-Clarke agreed to explore options to capture such enquiries.

    d. The Portal would only be able to log responses sent directly by the Team. Copies of such answers would be available to Members.

    e. Response times were targeted at 20 working days, though this was not currently being met. Corporate Management had expressed that responses to Member queries must be prioritised. Member enquiries and constituent complaints were jointly investigated if they pertained to the same subject.

    f. The future opportunities presented by Artificial Intelligence (AI) were discussed, recognising that some enquiries sought detail about information already available.

g. The Portal was not a casework management tool, but Mr Watts offered to explore options outside of the meeting.

h. Mr Watts agreed with Members that an intuitive way of capturing all inquiries dealt with, throughout the organisation, was needed.

i. In response to a question about the Portal's security, Ms. Blackburn-Clarke emphasised that KCC staff could only access the system using their KCC laptops with single sign-on. She also noted that all case activities were logged, and an audit trail was maintained.

j. A Member asked whether there was scope for Members to submit their District/ Borough enquiries through the Portal. Mr. Watts explained that conversations had been held in the past about data sharing between councils, but GDPR restrictions made this difficult because of the sensitive nature of data held by KCC.

6. The Committee agreed that the Portal be launched after the May 2025 elections. In the meantime, officers would look into testing the system with a small number of Members.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

11. Verbal Updates
(Item 5)

Benjamin Watts, General Counsel and Kay Goldsmith, Scrutiny Research Officer were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr. Watts introduced the update which would provide the Committee with an overview of progress in preparation for the May 2025 elections.

2. Mrs Goldsmith began by showing Members the "Evolve" branding and logo developed by officers for use in the member induction and wider development programme. The purpose of a single identity was to ensure that Members and officers could easily recognise available resources and know they were core member development offerings. The name "Evolve" was chosen to reflect KCC's commitment to enhancing member skills and knowledge, enabling them to perform their roles to the best of their abilities.

3. The Committee expressed reservations about the brand name and logo design, reflecting that they were too far removed from the general KCC brand. Mr. Watts agreed that the brand would be reviewed and modified to better align with Members' expectations.

4. Mrs Goldsmith went on to explain about the pre-induction pack, a selection of key documents that would be shared with prospective candidates ahead of the elections. The pack was to include the following:

   a. An FAQ page with information including payroll information, the ICT offer and where to park when visiting Sessions House.

   b. A guide to committee procedures - a summary of parts of the Constitution that would aid Members during meetings. For example, committee etiquette, points of order, motions and amendments.

   c. Committee overviews - these were single pages about each of the main committees setting out their purpose, examples of previous agenda items, and details about membership numbers and training available.

   d. Member role descriptions - a copy of the document that sits alongside the Constitution online.

   e. Local leadership framework for councillor's workbook - a copy of the Local Government Association (LGA) workbook that Members would be able to use to frame their personal development needs.

   f. A copy of the induction timetable so candidates could see the time commitment in the early weeks.

5. The Committee requested to see the pack at a future meeting, the date of which was to be arranged.

6. The Committee made the following comments and requested changes:

   a. They wanted the pack to be written in plain English to ensure it was accessible for candidates.

   b. The code of conduct to be included in the pack.

   c. The use of infographics and visuals where possible to aid understanding. Mr Watts concurred, emphasising that the pack should be as visual and engaging as possible

   d. The pack to highlight the significant time and effort required to be a councillor, along with an explanation of expectations regarding committee membership and groups.

7. Mrs Goldsmith moved on to the training offer for current Members. She explained that Cyber Security training hosted by colleagues in Cantium had been well received, with approximately 60 members attending.

8. A Microsoft apps workshop was to be organised for new Members to demonstrate the various functions and uses of the Microsoft suite of apps.

9. Inclusion workshops were in the diary, with a current sign up rate of around 25%. Mr Watts sought the views of the Committee as to whether they felt the training should go ahead as planned, noting how close it was to the upcoming elections. Following discussion, it was agreed that the training would be cancelled, with fresh dates found for after the elections.

10. Mrs Goldsmith raised with the Committee a review of the Member KNet pages and whether there were alternative options such as SharePoint available. Members suggested this be tabled at the next meeting to allow them time to consider.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted.