From: Dylan Jeffrey, Chairman, Member Development Sub Committee
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To: Selection and Member Services Committee, 19th October 2023

Subject: Member Development Sub Committee – Annual Report

Status: Unrestricted

1. Introduction

1.1 The Member Development Sub Committee[1] met on 2nd November 2022 and subsequently met in an informal setting on 23rd February 2023 to discuss the future direction of Member Development. The Committee agreed that a survey was to be conducted to capture the collective views of Members of the training requirements needed including personal development, training formats, timetabling and communications.

1.2 The Committee Chairman, following feedback from the group constructed a survey that was distributed to Members between 15 May 2023 and 26 May 2023 inclusive. The findings from the survey were presented to Sub Committee Members on 27th September 2023 and analysis was undertaken.

1.3 This annual report provides an overview of the findings and future planning.

2 Survey Response

2.1 An online questionnaire was created, consisting of 30 questions and distributed to Members during a two-week window. Although encouraged to participate in the survey, it was not a mandatory requirement.

2.2 The Chairman through periodic reminders sent prompts to Group Leaders and Members to participate. A few Members reported problems with the link, but this was due to attempts to access this while not logged in to KCC systems. For those Members that continued to experience problems options were made available to complete with an officer inputting the results and an open version was provided upon request.

2.3 Member engagement has proved difficult in the past but with the recurrent publicity and reminder from the Committee Chairman a total of 55 out of 80 Members (the Council had one vacancy at the time) responded.

2.4 The full results of the survey are contained within Appendix 1.

1 **Agenda for Member Development Sub-Committee on Wednesday, 2nd November, 2022, 10.30 am (kent.gov.uk)**
2 **AGS 2021-22 (kent.gov.uk)**

3 Survey Findings – Our Members and Their Role

3.1 At the September Sub Committee, the results were collectively analysed, and each question was taken in turn and discussed.

3.2 The first section of the question focussed on learning about our Members and their role within the Council. Running concurrently are the actions arising from the Annual Governance Statement 2021-22[2] (AGS). The Statement highlights several key areas relating to learning and development and will have its own programme of events but should not sit in isolation to the work undertaken by the Sub Committee. The survey provided an opportunity for some focussed governance questions to be considered which will aid that programme's development.

3.3 It was noted from the results of the first question that a few Members were defining their role as an Executive Member and from the open field box identified that respondents described their role in governance in a varying degree. As aforementioned the development programme arising from the AGS will assist Members with a formal definition and training relating to the role as set out in the Constitution. When and if the Sub Committee chose to survey again a comparison in such questions will be useful.

3.4 Members were inducted in May 2021 and during this period we remained in a period of restricted working due to the pandemic. Members therefore experienced a limited programme of events both in terms of learning methods, which was virtual only, and by way of networking with both new and returning Members to enable those all-important first engagements.

3.5 Question 3 provided an opportunity to ask Members to define how communications can be improved – the results from this section will thread through the design of the programme to encompass key points identified, such as requests for networking opportunities, early engagement, utilisation of briefings and finding new ways to communicate with our Members.

4 Survey Findings – Member Scheduling

4.1 The survey results within section two focussed on preferences on scheduling that will enable the Committee to plan accordingly and ensure that Member and Officer time was used effectively based on findings. Previously, when events had been held in person it was noted that attendance levels were low or at the last minute a few Members withdrew due to other commitments.

4.2 The results were mixed thus inconclusive, and the Committee agreed that Member Development sessions are to be scheduled on a quarterly basis. This was defined not only due to the higher proportion of Members requesting that timeframe but encompasses those Members who wanted a more frequent programme. Member Briefings of course, although based on departmental information sharing will continue to increase Member knowledge and awareness and will continue to take place in addition to independent Member Development sessions.

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4.3 The delivery format is incredibly important to encourage engagement and the survey sought preferences. The Committee agreed that due to the current prohibition of hybrid facilities at present in person development sessions are the priority. In turn this was felt that it would enable opportunities for Members to network too.

4.4 The Committee Chairman, during the construction of the survey, wanted to clearly understand the commitments that Members had in addition to their Member role. The findings from those questions and the open field boxes clearly identified that Members require plenty of notice to plan their scheduled in advance. This should not only aid them but will hopefully increase attendance numbers by way of a well organised forward plan.

4.5 Focussing on preferred timings will be where the Committee felt that they may need to experiment in the first instance to ensure the correct formula to boost attendance numbers. In the first instance, the Committee agreed that afternoon sessions were preferred.

4.6 Our current set formula for Committees see increased attendance of Members during Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and it was agreed that sessions following on from Committees may be a good starting point for training sessions.

4.7 Good feedback mechanisms and recurrent attendance monitoring will ensure that the Committee can be responsive to session planning. It was understood that it may take some elements of experimentation to reach the perfect formula for boosting attendance.

5 Survey Findings – Tailored Training

5.1 Personal Developments Plans (PDPs) were a key focus for the Committee, but it should be noted that nearly half of respondents did not give an opinion on them. In previous terms, PDPs were developed with an Officer and so this option is to be explored further but there was concern about resource allocation and to the boundaries between Members and Officers.

5.2 It was identified that a structured exercise should be undertaken for those Members that hold a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) to ensure that they receive adequate training to undertake their role effectively. Examples of this could include Chairman training, Key Decision Training, etc.

5.3 The Committee Chairman was keen to explore psychometric testing for Members and just over half of respondents expressed an interest in this. However, following exploration of the matter with Learning and Development colleagues, the cost to provide such a service was high and due to the unique role of a Member difficult to analyse. Committee Members were keen to continue to explore this matter and consideration is to be given to investigate the matter further, with the potential to discuss this with local colleges and universities.

5.4 Questions 17, 18, 21 and 22 will be analysed further by the Committee to produce an ongoing timetable for existing Members and aid the design for the 2025 induction. It was noted that a theme that came through strongly was that Members found the Council difficult to navigate. A new system will need to be explored to attempt to resolve these matters. This will not only aid Members but assist directorates to manage Member enquiries whilst dealing with an increased demand on resources.

5.5 Some Committee Members highlighted opportunities to utilise similar styles of training as used by Planning Applications Committee or Governance and Audit Committee. This style gave focus to a topical subject matter and it was suggested that this could be utilised to aid directorate understanding in conjunction with Cabinet Committees, but were open to all Members if they had an interest in the matter.

5.6 The remaining questions focussed on personal training requirements for Members and the Committee were keen to promote KCC as a learning organisation and move away from an 'I know everything' culture. It was felt that the future design of PDPs could include a 'what did you achieve' question to give focus to this point.

5.7 To ensure sensible use of public funding priority will be given to certain subjects, as well as where possible subjects that could be packaged together to provide value for money. This will also ensure that Members time is utilised effectively.

6 Budgets and Course Monitoring

6.1 The Member Development budget currently consists of requests for spend, which has predominantly been for conference attendance and requests being sent directly to the Learning and Development team to administer. The Sub Committee felt that the budget should not be used for conference attendance and should be on focussed spend. There has been little oversight of the spend and the specified need for training.

6.2 Committee Members have therefore requested that a system is developed to provide monitoring and will be managed in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Senior Responsible Officer. This will ensure clear reporting mechanisms for annual reports and to monitor Member learning. This could assist with spotting learning trends and enable Committee to design in-house training in groups and avoid duplicate learning at an increased cost to the Council.

6.3 The Committee agreed that they would like Group responsibility for the training budget and requests for learning and development. Additionally, learning could be identified where individuals could attend training events and subsequently report back to the Groups on the learning received and share such content more widely, in turn enabling value for money.

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7 Formalised Records

7.1 It is vital that when involving public expenditure formalised records are maintained to not only assist in monitoring but to inform future learning. It also will aid future Freedom of Information requests that are occasionally requested.

7.2 Committee Members wished to maintain a record of learning and development undertaken by each Member. This record would be made available to Group Leaders for one-to-one discussions and to help inform who has the relevant training to sit on various committees or expressed an interest to do so in future.

7.3 Recent Pensions Fund Committee and Pension Board meetings have recently introduced an annual report for each Committee Member to complete and is provided to the Responsible Officer. This followed recommendations from a CIPFA report and was identified as good practice and one which the group wished to explore further.

8 Charter Plus

8.1 The Sub Committee discussed the Councillor Development Charter Plus and was a point of discussion at last year's Member Development Sub Committee about its status.

8.2 Subsequent to that meeting South East Employers (SEEMP) confirmed that membership of the Councillor Development Charter Plus was extended to the end of 2021 due to Covid but has now lapsed. The three-year recommitment fee is £4,500/VAT for a non-SEE Member. (Member Rate £3,750).

8.3 At this time and due to the constraints on council finances the Committee agreed to defer this for now.

9 Next Steps

9.1 Committee Members identified some key training that was to be made a priority and included:

    a) Training on Executive Decisions for Cabinet Members
    b) Media Training for Executive Members, Chairman and Opposition Group Leaders
    c) Democratic Services Focussed Training including use of Mod.gov systems
    d) Chairman Training
    e) Priority on training identified in the AGS
    f) Member Awareness Sessions on the Armed Forces Covenant and Corporate Parenting
    g) Personal Safety
    h) Ordinary Committee Training – Regulation Committee, etc.

9.2 In addition, to ensure the continued governance security of the Council, particularly through such a period of change, a focus on the development of a more in-depth substitution list will need to be developed. Along with Democratic Services and relevant directorates that support regulatory

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committees, focussed learning sessions and Group encouragement on attendance will be required. Planning Applications Committee training held in June 2023 saw an increased attendance rate through such methods.

9.3 A forward plan is to be created following discussion at Selection and Member Services Committee and circulated to Members to ensure that we, as requested, notify Members in good time.

9.4 A new Member Development mailbox has been created so that it gives a focus to Member Development and a Microsoft Teams site will be created for users of that system as another tool for promotion.

9.5 The Sub Committee will recurrently meet to discuss developments and course feedback and begin to start the preparations for designing the 2025 Induction programme, again with the assistance of the 2023 Survey findings.

9.6 The Sub Committee agreed that this new programme of learning and development, except for the immediate need for Executive Decision training, shall commence from January 2024.

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Recommendation(s):

Selection and Member Services Committee is asked to:

- Note and discuss Member Development to provide contribution to the key findings
- Provide a view on the budget arrangements for Learning and Development allocations
- Provide feedback on Appendix A

Appendices

Appendix A – Member Development Survey Results

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