

From: Dylan Jeffrey, Chairman, Member Development Sub Committee  
Ben Watts, General Counsel

To: Member Development Sub Committee – 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Subject: Member Development – 2025 Member Induction Planning

Status: Unrestricted

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Member Development Sub Committee has a role to support the development of the induction programme in appropriate years and on 1 May 2025, Kent County Council will be holding its election.
- 1.2 An officer working group has been established and will be working with colleagues across the Council to design and deliver a programme for our newly elected members. The Committee is asked to consider the draft programme to date and provide evaluation and guidance on the proposed plans before they are finalised.

## **2. Draft Programme**

- 2.1 The draft programme has been developed by analysing other county authority induction programme delivery, as well as via liaison with Kent's District and Borough colleagues in a lessons learned exercise. Previous and current surveys have, and continue to, assist in the development too.
- 2.2 Appendix 1 documents the first iteration for Committee and has been designed to provide a large amount of information and training, whilst being mindful that Members may be employed, have personal commitments or hold twin hatter roles in other authorities. The current design focuses around four phases:
- 2.3 Phase 1 – Early candidate engagement and preparation for Member changes
  - a) Elections cannot be predicted and we will not know some Member changes until election day. However, following candidate selection we may know some changes prior to nominations opening. We can therefore start to prepare for known knowns and communications will go out in early January to Groups to enquire about those standing again. This will enable us to prepare for return of equipment and prepare closedown of IT and HR accounts, as well as provide guidance to non-returning Members.

A view would be welcomed from the Committee on this process, as well as on constituent case handover to avoid disruption to our residents and officers case management handling.

- b) A lesson learned from the 2021 induction was that relevant notice was not given to newly elected Members of the early induction requirements. From

listening to Members engaged in district elections and subsequently in the conversations with District and Borough colleagues it is good practice to issue the agreed induction programme, and in particular those first few months of activity, as early as possible and where possible on more than one occasion. The Member Development team will work closely with the Elections team to coordinate that.

- c) Due to the nature of Kent County Council services, County Members also require to be Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked and that will be communicated too to plan document routes and avoid concerns post-election about such processes. This process will be more swift with a dedicated team from HR assisting us with this this time, therefore our new Members will be need to be ready on week 1 with their documentation.

#### 2.4 Phase 2 – Welcome to the County Council and being a County Councillor

- a) This phase will take place during May. The opening programme is built around onboarding activities and with a focus point on the County Council AGM, scheduled for Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May.
- b) Learning from 2021 and with advanced communications the first week, slightly impacted by a bank holiday on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> May, will have a series of events where our new Members will be invited to book an appointment on Tuesday-Friday; the aim is to have 20 appointments a day. The draft programme details the overview for those appointments.
- c) The following week the focus will turn to learning about the County Council and the services it provides. This will be at high level, followed by dedicated directorate information sessions in phase 3 and 4. Learning from other authorities they use a 'Hot Topic' briefing, which may be particularly useful for new Members that will focus on current county events, pressures and opportunities within the Council for the year ahead.
- d) The first meeting that our new Members will be involved in will be the County Council AGM and a session on procedures and processes for that meeting will be delivered to familiarise Members.

There may be an opportunity to run this session as part of the onboarding week with a session in the Chamber and a view from the Committee would be welcomed on that.

- e) Attention will then turn to roles and responsibilities, standards, committees and decision making. Members will be aware that as part of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) this is and, continues to be, an area for development. If the Council gets this correct from the start of a new Member term it will provide a good foundation for improved governance and behaviour. With the aim to continue to build on that through the four year term.
- f) Phase 2 concludes with personal safety, a session on how Members can be safe in the community, including a focus on lone working.

## 2.5 Phase 3 – Getting to Know Democracy and the Council

- a) Phase 3 is our details and learning phase. By this stage Groups and Independent members will know proportionality and appointments to committee and other bodies. Once again listening to feedback this phase has been designed to provide committee key skills, areas where Members are involved in constituent representation such as Appeals and areas of responsibility held within the Member role.
- b) At the time of writing, results of a Member survey are being analysed and will feed into the continued development of this phase but a view from Committee is sought to assist in answering the question – what did I not know by month 2 or 3 that would have been of benefit to me and my constituents?

## 2.6 Phase 4 – Knowledge Builder

- a) As we move into phase 4 we are starting to look to immediate and future skills that a Member may need to undertake their role. From previous feedback and learning from other authorities some learning and development has been identified and can be built upon by the Committee.
- b) Committee may also wish to consider their approach to Personal Development Plans (PDP) or consider this at a later committee. There is a mixed approach to PDP in other authorities, some stating and, as previously experienced by Learning and Development and Member Services, that engagement with such a process tends to be low and therefore does not provide effective representation in building a structured Member Development Plan and/or Strategy.
- c) Other authorities appear to favour a feedback mechanism either with surveys or using feedback forms sent from delivered courses to inform future subjects of interest. This feedback is then provided to committee to build the learning and development annual plan.

## 2.7 Supplementary Programme – Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) Essential Learning Programme

- a) Members will be aware that the Council cannot mandate learning unless stipulated by the Constitution or if agreed under a constitutional change. However, the Governance Working Party is considering some additional elements of mandated learning and these will be put forward as a suggested requirement in due course. Committee could however recommend essential learning, something championed by other authorities.
- b) The draft programme includes several subjects that are considered to be essential learning for such roles but is not an exhaustive list and the committee may wish to review and expand upon that. Consultation will also take place with SRA holders and their support officers on this programme if proposed by the Committee.

- c) The supplementary programme, if adopted, should also give consideration to SRA post holder changes and, similar to a by-election, be automatically implemented at change of role. This will ensure consistency in learning and for the Member have an informed development plan for their new role.

### **3. The Political Skills Framework**

- 3.1 Created by Professor Jo Silvester for the Local Government Association (LGA), in association with the Work Psychology Partnership, The Political Skills Framework has been developed to provide a supporting mechanism for local councillors and local authorities to support development opportunities for politicians and attracting new 'members of talent'.
- 3.2 Further analysis was undertaken and a revised Political Skills Toolkit was developed. The Toolkit is available in Appendix 2 along with a brief overview. We understand that the Framework is potentially under review and would expect that once updated local authorities will be notified.
- 3.3 We currently do not use the Framework as a basis for our member development programme and views are sought from Committee on whether they may wish to adopt this. If adopted, learning could be aligned to the six core skills:
- Local Leadership
  - Partnership Working
  - Communication Skills
  - Political Understanding
  - Scrutiny and Challenge
  - Regulating and Monitoring
- 3.4 Additionally, if PDP is a requirement of the committee then the core skills could be used in that process. With examples of PDP proformas in the toolkit for consideration.

### **4. Communications and Navigating the Council**

- 4.1 Member feedback has and, continues to be, demonstrating that Members have difficulty in navigating the Council and finding suitable information. The officer working group is designing plans, that will be brought before the committee in December on how we intend to enhance this. Furthermore, engagement with the Corporate Management Team and Directorates will commence at pace to develop a system that will assist with Member casework and information sharing, while being mindful that the Council remains under resource pressure.

### **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 In summary, the report poses a number of questions for the Committee to consider and comment on:

#### Phase 1 Activity

1. How do we engage with current Members on the transition from one term to the next?

2. What plans should we put in place for Member changes – handovers, mentoring?
3. What should the path for finalising the draft programme and dissemination take?

#### Phase 2 Activity

4. Week 1 activities – are they enough or are they too much?
5. When should preparing for County Council take place – on induction day or a dedicated session?
6. Phase 2 subject overview – what did you not know by month 2 or 3 that would have been of benefit to me and my constituents?
7. What did I find useful in the first few weeks?
8. What would I have found useful in the first few weeks?

#### Phase 3 Activity

9. What immediate and future skills do Members need to undertake their role – short and long term?
10. Do we adopt PDP or some other mechanism for building the member development programme?
11. Phase 3 subject overview – what did you not know by month 2 or 3 that would have been of benefit to me and my constituents?
12. What did I find useful in the first few months?
13. What would I have found useful in the first few months?

#### SRA Essential Learning Programme

14. Do we require an SRA Essential Learning Programme?  
What essential learning do SRA holders require to undertake their role?

#### Political Skills Framework

15. Does the committee wish to adopt the framework and toolkit to underpin the member development programme? Taking into account PDP if adopted.
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Recommendation(s):

Member Development Sub Committee is asked to:

- Discuss and comment on the report, including key questions posed under 5.1.
- Contribute to the draft member induction plan, with the aim of providing a reworked draft programme to Selection and Member Services on 5<sup>th</sup> December for first comment.
- Request a report is brought before the December Committee meeting to discuss communications and council navigation plans.
- Request further areas of interest on Member Induction and Development.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Draft Induction Programme

Appendix 2 - Political Skills Framework

## **Report Author and Relevant Director**

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