

Committee: Audit & Standards Committee
Title: Member Development Strategy – Task and Finish Group
Report Author: Ben Ferguson, Democratic Services Manager
bferguson@uttlesford.gov.uk

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Summary

1. This paper proposes the establishment of a Task and Finish Group in order to produce a Member Development Strategy.
2. The Council has identified development and training as one of its priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 and it has been recommended that work be undertaken to initiate a strategy to inform the development of members. This is so that councillors have a full range of skills to maximise their ability for the benefit of residents in the district and to assist councillors in their role as community leaders.
3. It is proposed that a Member Development Strategy be produced by a cross party Task and Finish Group to introduce a step-change in the way the Council approaches the training of councillors. It is essential that any established Strategy has the buy-in of members and therefore the process will be member led with officer support.

Recommendation

4. To establish a Task and Finish Group as set out in the scoping report (Appendix A) to produce a Member Development Strategy.

Financial Implications

5. The Task and Finish Group will be resourced from existing budgets. However, a review of the member development budget will be incorporated into the project.

Background Papers

6. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
 - None

Impact

- 7.

Communication/Consultation	Nil
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Community Safety	Nil
Equalities	Nil
Health and Safety	Nil
Human Rights/Legal Implications	Elements of Member training is mandated by the Constitution and/or legislation but there is no legal requirement to establish a Member Development Strategy. However, the Strategy would look to instil best practice and provide best value across the Development programme.
Sustainability	Nil
Ward-specific impacts	All wards
Workforce/Workplace	The adoption of a Member Development Strategy is not likely to increase the available training sessions open to members, as such training is being arranged in any case, but it will formalise the approach to training, provide review mechanisms and councillor consultation opportunities, as well as ensure that members buy-in to training expectations.

Situation

What is a Member Development Strategy?

8. A Member Development Strategy is an overarching framework for member development, setting out the principles, objectives and commitments that underpin the aims and delivery of councillor training. Furthermore, a Member Development Strategy will include formal mechanisms to drive, review and monitor development on a continuous basis.
9. As per the Local Government Association's guidance, the following principles should be enshrined within the Strategy:
 - promote the purpose and importance of councillor development and ensure buy-in from all levels of councillors and officers
 - promote a positive and inclusive culture of learning, development and continual improvement
 - ensure the needs of councillors are understood
 - provide high quality training and learning through needs assessment, reviews and evaluations
 - provide an engaging programme of learning and development to ensure councillors can be effective and confident in their role

- strengthen councillor-officer relationships
 - enhance democracy, participation and councillor diversity
 - celebrate achievements and impact.
10. Two current examples of Member Development Strategies can be found on the following links: [Draft 2024 Member Development Strategy.pdf \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Draft%202024%20Member%20Development%20Strategy.pdf) and [Appendix 1 - Member Development Strategy 2024-25.pdf \(thurrock.gov.uk\)](https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Appendix%201%20-%20Member%20Development%20Strategy%202024-25.pdf). These examples were chosen to demonstrate the range of applicable principles and practical arrangements that can be incorporated into a Member Development Strategy. As well as providing the standards and aims that inform Member Development, the Strategies outline formal roles and responsibilities, practical and operational concerns in terms of delivery (i.e. online vs. in-person sessions) and provide agreed definitions in respect of member training (i.e. mandatory vs. optional).

Member Development at UDC

11. Currently, the Member Development programme is driven by the following:
- Mandatory training required for regulatory or standards matters - e.g. Planning, Licensing and Code of Conduct functions.
 - Committee specific training requirements (non-mandatory) – e.g. Scrutiny, audit function etc
 - Non-committee specific training and briefings (in liaison with lead and senior officers) – e.g. development management, safeguarding, voluntary sector.
 - Consultation with members and Group Leaders – surveys and questionnaires have been circulated following individual sessions and programmes; the post May 2023 induction schedule was circulated with group leaders for comment at the beginning of January 2023 in order to share a confirmed programme with electoral candidates at the first briefing in February 2023.
 - Member requests and best practice recommendations from local government organisations e.g. the Local Government Association (LGA), Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS).
12. The Member Development programme that has been implemented since the beginning of Members' terms in May 2023 has been attached as Appendix B. This includes the upcoming sessions scheduled for autumn 2024.

Why establish a Member Development Strategy via a Task and Finish Group?

13. It is recommended that a Member Development Strategy be produced in order to take a member agreed and structured approach to training. If agreed, this framework will provide officers and members a degree of certainty in respect of training aims and commitments. It also provides an opportunity to establish best practice in respect of measuring the effectiveness of training, to ensure

best value and efficacy is achieved, as well as that the needs of councillors are understood and acted upon.

14. While the aforementioned LGA principles will inform the Member Development Strategy, it should be specifically tailored to the needs of Uttlesford District Council. Therefore, the Task and Finish Group will be provided time to ascertain national best practice, identify the particular and evolving needs of UDC councillors and draft a strategy. It is recommended that the Task and Finish Group report back to the Audit and Standards Committee at its meeting in March 2025. If the Committee is so minded, it would then recommend the Strategy for adoption at Full Council in April 2025, in order for the new Strategy to be implemented in readiness for the 2025/2026 municipal year.

Risk Analysis

15.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The introduction of a Member Development Strategy will provide a formal framework for member training that will inform development programmes in future. This structure will provide certainty and establish milestones for monitoring and reviewing the development programme, to ensure that the training offered to members evolves with the needs of the district.	2	2	To produce a Member Development Strategy by way of a Task and Finish Group project. This will ensure that the Strategy is owned by Members, tailored to the needs of UDC.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.