

Committee: Full Council

Date: Tuesday, 22
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Title: Member Development Strategy

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Lead Member: Councillor Edward Oliver, Chair of the Audit
and Standards Committee

Summary

1. At the meeting on 26 September 2024, the Audit and Standards Committee established a cross-party Task and Finish Group in order to produce a Member Development Strategy to be considered at the Committee meeting on 25 March 2025.
2. At the Audit and Standards Committee meeting on 25 March 2025, the Strategy was recommended to full Council for approval in readiness for implementation in the new municipal year in May 2025.
3. The Task and Finish Group consisted of Councillors Lemon (Chair), Driscoll and Silcock and the Group met four times between November 2024 – February 2025. A summary of the Group's work can be found in the situation section of this report, as well as the agendas, reports and minutes available [here](#).
4. At the meeting on 27 February 2025, the Group considered an updated Strategy document and were resolved to recommend the Strategy for approval to the Audit and Standards Committee, subject to the final version being circulated by email for comment.
5. The draft Member Development Strategy, as recommended by the Task and Finish Group and Audit and Standards Committee, is attached as Appendix A to this report.

Recommendation

6. To approve the draft Member Development Strategy (Appendix A).

Financial Implications

7. Member Development will be resourced from existing budgets. However, a review of the member development budget will be incorporated into the governance process as proposed in the draft Strategy.

Background Papers

8. The meeting documentation of the Member Development Task and Finish Group which informed this report is available [here](#).

Impact

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Communication/Consultation	An anonymous member survey was circulated on the instruction of the Task and Finish Group in February 2025.
Community Safety	Nil
Equalities	The draft Strategy reflects the Council's commitment to inclusivity and equal access.
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 establishes mechanisms to review training needs on an ongoing basis and provide member oversight by way of a Member Development Working Group.
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?

10. 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. Importantly, a Member Development Strategy will include formal mechanisms to drive, review and monitor development on a continuous basis.

Scope of Member Development Strategy Task and Finish Group

11. At the meeting on [26 September 2024](#), the Audit and Standards Committee considered a scoping report which directed the work of the Task and Finish Group. In short, the Group were instructed to produce a Member Development Strategy that would be fit for purpose at Uttlesford District Council.
12. At the first meeting of the [Task and Finish Group on 7 November 2024](#), members outlined the scope and purpose of the draft Member Development Strategy, with reference to the main principles outlined in best practice, specifically the Local Government Association's (LGA) model guidance, and with relevant examples included from other Local Authorities. Members also considered the LGA's Councillor Development Strategy Checklist and agreed to use the checklist as a steering document to draft the Strategy.

Member Development Strategy

13. The Task and Finish Group met again on 16 December 2024, 22 January 2025 and 27 February 2025 and considered an updated draft Strategy at each of these meetings. Member discussion and requests led to further revisions to the draft Strategy. Reports, agendas and minutes of the Group, can be found [here](#).
14. The Group requested that the Strategy encapsulate the following aims:
 - 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
 - Strengthen councillor-officer relationships
 - Enhance democracy, participation and councillor diversity
 - Deliver effective training that provides value for money

Governance of the Member Development Strategy

15. In order to achieve these aims, the Group felt it was important to establish mechanisms to drive, review and deliver councillor development on an ongoing basis. It was also vital that councillors' development was owned by members and that their training needs were understood. Therefore, the Group proposes to establish a standing, cross-party working group, the Member

Development Working Group (MDWG), to provide ongoing oversight of councillors' development.

16. The MDWG would also be responsible for reviewing the Strategy document itself on an annual basis, to ensure any issues identified were addressed but also to incorporate any emerging best practice that had come to light over the course of the previous year. Therefore, the Strategy would be a 'living document' and subject to review and change in future years.

17. Subject to the Strategy's approval, the MDWG would be a cross-party working group of Council, with one nomination invited from each political group. The MDWG would meet a minimum of twice a year, firstly, to review the previous year's development feedback, and secondly, to endorse a development programme for the year ahead. They would also be tasked with producing an annual report to be considered by the Audit and Standards Committee, incorporating:

- financial budget allocation and other capacity to support member development activities
- attendance across the development programme
- effectiveness and Member satisfaction with individual sessions
- headline issues and any Member feedback relating to councillor training and development

18. The draft Terms of Reference of the MDWG is attached as Appendix B.

19. In order to inform the annual review of the MDWG, it is proposed to provide anonymous member evaluation forms for all future training sessions. This feedback will be crucial in improving future training programmes.

Training Delivery, Induction and General Development Programmes

20. The Task and Finish Group considered the LGA's best practice checklist in terms of training delivery, as well as providing a distinction between a 'General Development Programme' and an 'Induction Programme' for new councillors. Following the announcement of Local Government Restructuring, the induction section of the Strategy has been revised to refer to by-elections, rather than all-out elections.

21. The Task and Finish Group felt it was important to provide clarity to members regarding mandatory and non-mandatory training sessions, and, therefore, the Strategy commits the Council to producing an annual programme denoting which sessions are to be mandatory. Furthermore, the Strategy sets-out the following annual training sessions that are already considered mandatory for constitutional reasons:

- Code of Conduct Training – all councillors are required to complete this training.

- Code of Conduct Panel Training - for sitting members and substitutes of the Audit and Standards Committee, this training is required to sit on Standards Panels.
- Planning Committee Training – for sitting members and substitutes of the Planning Committee, this training is required to sit on Committee
- Licensing and Environmental Health Panel Training - for sitting members and substitutes of the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee, this training is required to sit on Licensing Panel meetings.

22. Potential training delivery methods have been listed in the Strategy but are by no means exhaustive. In the event that new training delivery methods come to the attention of the MDWG, these can be incorporated into the Strategy during its annual review.

Next steps

23. Subject to the approval of full Council, officers will look to establish the cross-party Member Development Working Group (MDWG) and seek a nomination from each Political Group in readiness for Annual Council in May. It should be noted that the members of the Task and Finish Group, Councillors Lemon, Driscoll and Silcock, have requested that they sit on the first iteration of the MDWG, to allow for a degree of continuity in implementing the Strategy. This request will be raised with their respective political group leaders, and a nomination will also be sought from the Uttlesford Independent Group.

24. Following the establishment of the Group, a meeting will be arranged in late 2025 to evaluate the training feedback to date and review the effectiveness of the Strategy itself. The Group would then meet again in early 2026 to endorse the 2026/27 training programme and approve its annual report to the Audit and Standards Committee. Its first annual report is likely to be considered at the Audit and Standards Committee meeting in March 2026.

Risk Analysis

25.

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	2	2	The Strategy itself incorporates mechanisms to keep member development under routine review and provide a channel for member feedback

ensure that the training offered to members evolves with the needs of the district.			to ensure needs are understood.
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- 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.