

Annual Report of Member Development 2023

Introduction from Cllr Jill Reeves, Chairman of the Member Development Steering Group



The Member Development annual reports sets out the achievements of the last year, the objectives of member development, our current development offer and how the Council supports its delivery to all Councillors.

The role and expectations of an elected Member are continuously changing and following the County Council election in 2021, we welcomed 31 new County Councillors onto the Council.

Essex County Council continues to face difficult challenges and the personal development of all Members is essential to the successful delivery of our strategic priorities on behalf of the people we represent and serve.

The current Member Development Steering Group have a good working relationship and have worked to ensure that the member development offer meets the needs of all members.

I urge all Members, even those with many years of experience, to take full advantage of the range of development opportunities on offer and to have a development discussion if you haven't had one.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the key officers, principally Sophie Crane and Joanna Boaler, who support the MDSG for their time and invaluable support. Without them we would not be where we are now.

Councillor Jill Reeves
Chairman of the Member Development Steering Group
April 2023

1. Member Development April 2022 – April 2023

In the last year a full member development programme has been delivered, members can read the schedule at Appendix 1.

Following feedback from members we have continued to hold the majority of our internal member development sessions online. We have continued to record sessions and make them available for members to view back in the own time or watch again at a later stage to clarify information. This is something, in addition to holding briefing sessions on a virtual basis, that the MDSG has asked officers to continue. Those sessions we have held in person were not as well attended as virtual sessions, although some sessions lend themselves only to in person, so these will continue on a face to face basis.

Personal development planning should be seen as a means to help Members update their knowledge and learn new skills to assist them to be more effective in supporting their large and diverse communities, we actively championed personal development planning following the election. In the last year officers have reviewed plans and updated them, Members are still encouraged to contact officers for support or advice, recomplete the personal development planning questionnaire or seek a confidential, individual meeting to discuss their developmental aspirations and agree any actions to take this forward. To date, 68 members have personal development plans in place.

Following the plan review we included topics suggested in individual meetings or through the personal development questionnaire, into the Annual Member Development Programme, this helps officers build a programme that meets the needs of members. This will continue into the next year.

2. Councillor Development Charter Plus

The LGA Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus provides councils with a robust framework and encourages member development across the sector. In 2020 South East Employers launched a new Charter framework is based on extensive consultation by the LGA. The Councillor Development Charter (Charter Plus) has three objectives:

1. There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support
2. The council has a strategic approach to councillor development
3. Learning and development is effective in building skills and knowledge

In January 2022, the LGA Assessment Team received a portfolio of evidence against the standards and an assessment team held a series of interviews and workshops to assess the Council against the Charter Plus. The feedback can be found within the appendix to this report.

We created an action plan based on the assessor's comments that is reviewed regularly at MDSG meetings. The current plan can be found within the appendix of this report.

We anticipate a mid-point review of the Charter Plus later in 2023 or early 2024.

3. Member Development Steering Group

The Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) are an informal group who meet between bi-monthly and quarterly each year. The current membership are confirmed as: Cllr Jill Reeves (Chairman), Cllr Marie Goldman, Cllr Ray Gooding, Cllr Carlo Guglielmi, Cllr Jeff Henry, Cllr Peter May and Cllr Aidan McGurran.

Members are encouraged to provide ideas and feedback to members of this Group.

The Group met three times since the last report to Council.

4. Resources

The Democracy Team keep and maintain a number of resources for you, most of these can be found online using the Member Portal that can be accessed by your personal or ECC devices and include links to the Member Development Strategy, the Member Development Steering Group Terms of Reference, personal development planning questionnaire and external nomination and evaluation forms. The Portal also includes access to E-Learning and presentations and other resources. You can also find recordings of the sessions via Teams. If members require access to the resources, please let officers know.

5. Evaluation

In accordance with the Member Development Strategy, we are committed to improving the development offer to Essex County Councillors. Following each member development session or external event, members are sent a feedback form and asked to complete this. An email is also sent after the event as a reminder. It is particularly important that members complete the quick evaluation form, this feedback is presented to members of the MDSG at each meeting and helps us seek improvements and share positive feedback.

6. The next 12 months

We have reached the halfway point of this Council; we are now looking forward to the next year to ensure that any role changes or committee commitments are supported. The work programme will focus on sessions from feedback and personal development plans and to support members on the current challenges.

If members would like a personal development discussion or have suggestions for development sessions, please let officers know.

7. Further information

Further information on Member Development at ECC can be found by reviewing our Member Development Strategy, the terms of reference of the MDSG and the Member Portal.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Member Development Schedule 2022/23

Date	Title	Attendees*
1 April 2022	Health and Care briefing	18
6 April 2022	Member Safety briefing	14
16 May 2022	Locality and Levelling up Funds briefing	36
26 May 2022	ECC Standards briefing	21
25 May 2022	Climate Action briefing	20
28 June 2022	Sensory awareness briefing	11
15 June 2022	Fostering briefing	15
5 July 2022	Electoral Boundary review briefing	31
18 July 2022	Short breaks briefing (children's social care)	16
5 October 2022	Military Covenant briefing	14
10 October 2022	Dementia and Public Health briefing	25
19 Oct 2022	Superfast Broadband briefing	16
23 Nov 2022	Essex Housing briefing	26
21 Nov 2022	Climate action: Green Infrastructure briefing	22
November and December 2022	The Advanced Dementia & Mobility Experience Essex	2
7 December 2022	Devolution briefing	30
9 January 2023	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner briefing	27
12 January 2023	Climate action: transport briefing	20
20 January 2023	Short breaks briefing (children's social care)	19
6 February 2023	Climate action: buildings briefing	21
20 March 2023	Business Intermediary Forum briefing	16
10 March 2023	Questioning Skills	13
30 March 2023	Scrutiny Skills	14

*This number refers to the number of members who attended the session at the time of delivery. It does not include members who subsequently watch the recording.

Appendix 2: Summary of feedback from the Member Development evaluations 2022/23.

- For internal ECC delivered briefings during 2022/23:
 - 64% of respondents reported their overall satisfaction with individual briefings as 'excellent' and 31% as 'good'
 - 71% of respondents reported that the briefing session they attended met all their personal objectives and for 22% 'most' objectives were met.
 - 91% of respondents reported that the briefing session they attended improved their knowledge of the subject area.
- For external development opportunities attended by members during 2022/23:
 - 65% of respondents reported that the activity fully met their expectations and personal objectives and 23% reported that it met 'most' of their objectives.
 - 90% of respondents reported that the activity improved their knowledge of the subject area.
 - 97% of respondents reported that they will use the information provided in their role at an ECC Member.

Appendix 3: ECC Charter Plus assessor's comments 2022

Continuous Improvement

- Further embed and take forward partnership working and identify opportunities for shared development with partners. This could include inviting partners to facilitate specific member development session.
- Explore offering additional training for Dementia Awareness, Being an Effective Opposition Member and how to have an impact on Outside Bodies.
- For twin hatted councillors, identify how the PDP recommendations can support councillors in their district roles and, subject to a councillor's agreement, share the development priorities with district/borough council key officers. This should assist in both prioritising and avoiding the duplication of training and development across the two tiers.
- Promote the benefits of councillor development and the Charter to district and borough councils to support a more strategic and joined-up approach to councillor development across the county.
- Further develop and support councillors with overview and scrutiny with a particular focus on embedding an approach for pre-decision scrutiny, which will enable non - executive councillors to make recommendations ahead of decisions being taken by Cabinet.
- The MDSG to look at how it can strengthen the evaluation of councillor development, including increasing the return rate of evaluation forms and follow up e mails with regards how Members are applying the learning.

Special Mention

- Top political and managerial commitment to councillor development. High level commitment and support from all group leaders and Chief Executive
- High profile and dedicated officer support, with recognised expertise and having the support of Members
- Engaged MDSG which meets regularly and has a strategic focus. Effectively chaired and accountable for the design, delivery and evaluation of the member development programme
- An effective response to Covid-19, quickly transferring the member development programme to virtual learning. Now looking at a hybrid approach based on member learning styles and preferences. To be led by the MDSG
- Commitment to the Be A Councillor campaign and approach
- Member development strategy regularly reviewed by MDSG and a member development programme supports the corporate strategy 'Everyone's Essex Strategy'
- Sustainable and regularly evaluated budget
- The Personal Development Process (PDP) is embedded and has a very high take up, with 68 out of 74 councillors having a PDP meeting and plan
- Councillors see the PDP's as a valuable process and help promote them to others. "Members are selling the PDP's to each other"
- Structured role profiles are in place. Member development is well promoted and supported via Charter Plus Case Studies that evidence the impact of programme
- Dedicated and structured leadership development programme both for inner and outer cabinet. Commitment and support to LGA Leadership Programmes. Awareness of key leadership development priorities with a recent focus on strengthening overview and scrutiny and support for Deputy Cabinet Members
- ECC approach to councillor development is exemplary and there is a clear culture of development underpinning the Charter Plus award.

Assessors' Comments

Thank you to members and officers at the council for making the assessment team feel so 'virtually' welcome.

Recommendation from the Verification Team

Essex County Council continues to meet, achieve and excel in respect of the Charter Plus Standard. A review of progress against the assessment team's recommendations for continuous improvement will take place in approximately 18 months. Congratulations on your continued success! We would encourage ECC to promote and share the benefits of MD and the Councillor Development Charter to the districts and boroughs across the County area.

Appendix 4: Member Development Action Plan 2022/24

Charter Plus Criteria	Assessor comments under continuous improvement
Learning is shared with other councillors and, where appropriate, with officers and stakeholders to encourage capacity building and a culture of learning across the council and externally	Further embed and take forward partnership working and identify opportunities for shared development with partners. This could include inviting partners to facilitate specific member development session.
The council has a structured process for regularly assessing councillors' individual learning and development needs based on focused objectives	Explore offering additional training for Dementia Awareness, Being an Effective Opposition Member and how to have an impact on Outside Bodies.
Learning is shared with other councillors and, where appropriate, with officers and stakeholders to encourage capacity building and a culture of learning across the council and externally	For twin hatted councillors, identify how the PDP recommendations can support councillors in their district roles and, subject to a councillor's agreement, share the development priorities with district/borough council key officers. This should assist in both prioritising and avoiding the duplication of training and development across the two tiers.
Learning is shared with other councillors and, where appropriate, with officers and stakeholders to encourage capacity building and a culture of learning across the council and externally	Promote the benefits of councillor development and the Charter to district and borough councils to support a more strategic and joined-up approach to councillor development across the county.
The council has a structured process for regularly assessing councillors' individual learning and development needs based on focused objectives	Further develop and support councillors with overview and scrutiny with a particular focus on embedding an approach for pre-decision scrutiny, which will enable non - executive councillors to make recommendations ahead of decisions being taken by Cabinet.

Investment in learning and development is regularly evaluated and improvements implemented

The MDSG to look at how it can strengthen the evaluation of councillor development, including increasing the return rate of evaluation forms and follow up e mails with regards how Members are applying the learning.