

Title of report: Member Development Strategy

Decision maker: Cabinet member finance and corporate services

Decision date: 31 March 2021

Report by: Democratic Services Manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

All Wards

Purpose

To approve and adopt the Council's Member Development Strategy. Herefordshire Council is committed to providing high quality development to its elected members. This strategy will underpin this commitment to ensure that every Herefordshire councillor has access to the learning and development they need to perform effectively in their role on the council and in supporting their electorate, now and in the future.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) The Member Development Strategy (Appendix A), for 2021-2023 is agreed and formally adopted.**

Alternative options

1. Do not adopt a member development strategy. This is not recommended. Local councils are strongly encouraged, by the Local Government Association (LGA), to create and adopt member development strategies to facilitate continuing professional development of our local councillors.

This strategy fulfils a commitment that Herefordshire Council would adopt such a strategy following the peer review conducted by the LGA.

2. Continue with our programme of member briefings, induction, role specific and mandatory training, unguided by a member development strategy. This is not recommended. A review of the member development offer has informed our approach to learning content, induction, member development sessions, training delivery, personal development planning and learning administration. Our current package of training only partially addresses the skills and training our members require. Putting in place a member development strategy provides a clear framework and commitment to investing in members' ongoing professional development.

Key considerations

3. It is recognised that the role of local member is becoming ever more challenging with the skills required by councillors to fulfil their roles becoming more diverse. The recent flooding emergencies and the ongoing public health emergency have demonstrated that our frontline councillors play a vital frontline first response. Ensuring that our members can successfully lead the council through these most challenging of times whilst also seeking to improve the opportunities and outcomes on behalf of the communities of Herefordshire has never been so important.
4. The council wants to ensure that every member has the appropriate knowledge, skills and behaviours to function at strategic and local settings is a priority for Herefordshire Council. Our community leaders represent our electorate whilst also taking decisions on their behalf. Many of those decisions carry with them statutory and regulatory responsibilities.
5. By putting in place a member led development strategy, the council can take a structured approach to measuring the effectiveness of member development and our effectiveness at meeting members' training and development needs.
6. This strategy is designed to set out the development available to members to help them to act reasonably, lawfully and proportionately in their vital role in representing residents and taking decisions on behalf of the community.
7. In shaping this strategy a member led development working group have provided their views and insights. This group included a cross section of members of the council and council officers from Democratic Services. In addition, as set out in the draft strategy, an all member survey was undertaken to set out the baseline evidence of development need. This is set out in appendix B.
8. The strategy has been drafted to reflect the views expressed by the member development working group and the responses to the all member survey. It a member led document with aims to ensure that:
 - a. Every Member has access to the learning and development they need to perform their role effectively and support their electorate
 - b. Roles and responsibilities of Members is clear in relation to their commitment to their professional development
 - c. To outline the roles and responsibilities of officers in the provision of Member development opportunities and training plans
 - d. The resources required to deliver the Member Development Strategy are put in place

- e. As an authority we promote the importance of learning and development for Members as a key element of a Member-Led authority
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- 9. The strategy seeks to clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of Officers in the provision of good quality member development and evaluation thereof. Sitting beneath this strategy will be the production of a member development training plan. In addition, as part of the work of the re-thinking governance group specific training needs of members in relation to any new constitutional revisions will be considered and factored in to the training plan. Further work will be undertaken with political group leaders to establish a 'matrix' of current members' skills and experiences.
 - 10. A budget of £10k has been put in place for the 2021/22 financial year to deliver the training programme. It is envisaged that training will be provided both in house, where the council has the necessary skills and capabilities to deliver and use of external providers. Where training is sourced from external providers, this will be in accordance with the council's contract procedure rules.
 - 11. This strategy is designed to run from 1 April, 2021. It will be reviewed following local elections in May, 2023 to ensure it remains relevant, and fit for purpose, to the elected member cohort.
 - 12. The training plan will be developed with the member development working group and influenced by the work of the rethinking governance working group. The training plan will be signed off by the member development working group and managed on behalf of members by the democratic services team. Budget approval will be given to training that has been identified and approved on the training work programme.

Baseline evidence -

- 13. Underpinning the strategy is a baseline survey of newly elected and returning members. This survey drew upon the LGAs Political Skills Framework Toolkit to provide an understanding of member's leadership, relationship building, communications and political skills and experiences. The survey questions and members' responses are highlighted in appendix B.
- 14. Twenty six of the fifty three members responded to the survey, a response rate of just under fifty per cent of the membership. Of those, responses were received from:
 - a) Members describing themselves as a re-elected member – 9 in total
 - b) Members describing themselves as a newly elected member – 17 in total

Local Leadership.

- 15. The majority of members (24 of the 26 responses received) felt confident to very confident about being able to act on issues that their constituents care most about. 2 respondents did not feel very confident in dealing with their constituents. Members were asked to identify a statement that illustrated how they provide a strong leadership role.
 - a) 16 of the 26 felt confident in talking to their community about what matters to them.
 - b) 6 of the 26 felt their constituents saw them as approachable
 - c) 3 of the 26 felt good at championing local needs, and
 - d) 1 of the 26 felt that they actively kept up to date with local concerns.

16. When asked to provide suggestions around ways in which members could improve their leadership skills a number of key themes emerged:
- a) Wanting to be pro-active in a committee role and having an affective voice
 - b) Strategies to deal with adversarial behaviours
 - c) Better understanding of political leadership
 - d) Community engagement and dealing with apathy

Relationship Building.

17. The majority of members (23 of the 25 responses received) felt confident to very confident about developing relationships with external partners, other councillors and officers. 2 respondents did not feel very confident in about developing relationships with external partners, other councillors and officers.
18. Members were asked to identify a statement that illustrated where they felt they were able to develop good working relationships.
- a) 19 of the 25 respondents felt confident that in developing relationships they were able to deliver positive outcomes as a result.
 - b) 1 of the 25 respondent stated that they actively build local partnership arrangements, with
 - c) 4 of the 25 respondents feeling that they engage relevant groups to ensure they are represented in their networks and relationships.
19. When asked to provide suggestions around ways in which members could improve their relationship/partnership working a number of key themes emerged:
- a) A greater need for clarity around accountability
 - b) External bodies linked with the council such as outside bodies and contractors such as Balfour Beatty Living Places
 - c) Building closer relationships with specific groups such as ethnic minorities and younger people

Communication.

20. Members were asked to identify a statement that illustrated their communication strengths.
- a) 17 of the 25 respondents noted that they communicated through a variety of different methods to their audiences
 - b) 5 of the 25 respondent stated that they were confident public speakers
 - c) 3 of the 25 respondents noted that they remained calm under pressure when confronted with challenging/robust discussions
 - d) 0 of the 25 respondents actively using technology to communicate their messages to people
21. When asked to provide suggestions around ways in which members could improve their communication a number of key themes emerged:
- a) A lack of knowledge about how to use social media and the value of it, particularly for communicating with local residents
 - b) Having more informal networking 'space' to share ideas informally
 - c) Being an effective communicator in public meetings, and
 - d) Communicating well during conflict/challenging behaviours

Political Understanding.

22. There was a relatively even split of opinion from members responding to this part of the survey. Members were asked to identify a statement that illustrated their political understanding. 19 of the 24 respondents indicated that they felt confident about their political understanding. 5 of the 24 respondents did not feel confident about their political understanding, with 1 respondent indicating that they would need to ask for assistance on political matters.
23. When asked to provide areas where respondents felt their political understanding was particularly good:
- a) 6 of the 24 responses noted that they promoted local democracy and increased public engagement
 - b) 6 of the 24 responses noted that they actively highlighted and demonstrated the values upon which they stood for election
 - c) 6 of the 24 responses noted that they proactively work with people to understand different views and values to their own
 - d) 5 of the 24 responses noted that they see to build cohesion and common positions between members of their political group, and
 - e) 1 of the 24 responses actively seeks to develop political intelligence of other political groups.
22. When asked to provide suggestions around ways in which members express their political understanding a number of key themes emerged:
- a) A sense that in committee all political viewpoints should be invited and properly considered
 - b) Climate change emergency – will require tough political decisions with carefully reasoned evidence
 - c) Politically blind when dealing with local matters – foster more political discussion to discuss our views
 - d) Local trust in local politics has been eroded as a result of austerity – expectations of what should be achieved by communities is often unachievable

The role of a local councillor.

23. The majority of members (24 of the 25 responses received) felt confident to very confident about their understanding of their role as a local councillor. 1 respondent indicated that they would need to ask for assistance in their understanding of their local councillor role.
24. Members were asked to identify a statement that illustrated where they felt they were particularly effective in their role as a local councillor.
- a) 14 of the 25 respondents felt clear in the roles expected of them, noting their role as a corporate parent or as a committee member.
 - b) 7 of the 25 respondent stated that their judgements were based on sound evidence
 - c) 3 of the 25 respondents highlighted that they actively monitor the work of the council to ensure that progress is being made against publicly stated objective, with
 - d) 1 of the 25 respondents seeking to understand the processes to ensure the council is taking decisions based upon a sound legal and governance footing
25. When asked to provide suggestions around ways in which members could improve their understanding of their role, the following key themes emerged:

- a) Attend performance challenge meetings
- b) Understanding of the governance and legal process of the council

Community impact

- 26. The council's code of corporate governance has a stated aim in relation to developing the organisation's capacity including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
- 27. Herefordshire Council needs appropriate structures and leadership, as well as people with the right skills, qualifications and mindset, to operate efficiently and effectively. Because individuals and external factors will change over time the council will continue to need to develop its capacity as a whole as well as that of individuals. Leadership is strengthened by the participation of people with different types of backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our community.

Environmental Impact

- 28. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
- 29. Whilst this is a decision to agree the Member Development Strategy it is a back office function and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

- 30. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 31. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. The new Member Development Strategy will be sensitive to the protected characteristics of the councillor cohort, and considerate of their diverse needs (eg. making training sessions accessible). In addition, equality will continue to be one of the components of member training in order to ensure that the organisation fully understands its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Resource implications

Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)	2021/22	2022/23	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
R	£10k	Estimated: £10k		£20k
TOTAL	£10k	Estimated: £10k		£20k

Legal implications

32. There are no direct legal or human rights implications arising from this report.

Risk management

33.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Risk: Failing to put a member development strategy in place potentially leaves our elected members unable to fulfil their electoral mandate.	As a member led authority, we will gather evidence on the skills and experiences our current cohort of members possess; where gaps are identified by our members we will seek to address this by providing training and development opportunities.
Opportunity: By agreeing this strategy and subsequent training programme, the council has the scope to apply for LGA charter status, a recognised standard in local authority member development practice.	The draft strategy sets out roles and responsibilities of officers in the provision of good quality member development and has been cognisant of the LGAs member development charter criteria.

34. The relevant risks will be managed at a service level.

Consultees

35. The views of the council's internal auditors have informed the development of the strategy.

Appendices

Appendix A: The draft Member Development Strategy

Appendix B: Member Development Survey Results

Background papers

None

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

1. **Local Government Association – Member Development Charter and Charter Plus:** a charter designed by the LGA to support effective political leadership, helping local authorities to strengthen local accountability, monitor performance and drive improvement.
2. **The Local Government Association Political Skills framework** sets out the key knowledge and skills needed to support new and experienced councillors in their efforts to develop the knowledge and skills to be effective in their role. The framework was originally drafted in 2004 and revised again in 2007 in recognition of the substantial culture change in attitudes towards political roles and how they should be carried out. [It can be viewed here.](#)