

Herefordshire Council

Member Development Strategy

2021 to 2023

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Foreword

Local councillors are first and foremost community leaders representing the ward for which you were elected. The work of a ward Councillor also includes decision-making, developing and reviewing council policy, scrutinising decisions taken by councillors on the executive (or Cabinet) and/or regulatory, quasi-judicial and statutory duties.

Arguably, the role of a local councillor has not changed to any great extent over recent time. However, the financial, political, environmental and social context within which councils operate has changed markedly in the last ten years or so.

The demands and fiscal constraint placed on local government mean that councils increasingly deliver key services in partnership with other organisations or outsource them entirely. Technology and the widespread use of social media are also having profound effects on how councillors are enabled to undertake their roles.

It has never been more important that as an authority we support local members to develop new skills to meet their hugely dynamic, important and challenging roles.

Herefordshire Council is committed to providing high quality development to its elected members. This member development strategy ensures that every member has access to the learning and development they need to effectively fulfil their roles, now and in the future.

Executive Summary

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. 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, supporting communities and taking decisions on behalf of the county's residents.

Importantly – this is a member led and informed strategy. The member development steering group (MDSG) ensures that development is member led and is accountable to the Council, supported and advised by council officers. 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. Members too have a responsibility to identify their development needs and undertake relevant training.

A structured approach to measuring the effectiveness of member development will ensure that our approach and content are fit for purpose and meet members' needs as well as the needs of the wider council and the communities they serve.

It is an ambition of the MDSG to build the necessary commitment, funding and support into our strategy to ensure it complies with the standards set out in the LGA charter for member development.

1.0 Commitment statement:

'An effective member development strategy that is 'owned' by the members themselves will enhance Members' abilities to meet their responsibilities'.

Herefordshire Council is committed to providing high quality development to its elected members to enable them to effectively fulfil their roles, now and in the future. All elected members have a responsibility to:

- Develop and maintain their knowledge of the Council's governance, constitution, structure, services, functions and statutory responsibilities
- Develop good working relationships with key council officers
- Develop and maintain their knowledge of the partner organisations which deliver services to Herefordshire
- Develop and maintain an understanding of the statutory responsibilities on Members personally, as a result of their role in decision making that affects the lives of Herefordshire's residents and visitors
- Act appropriately and at all times within the Member Code of Conduct
- Encourage the wider community to participate in the democratic process

2.0 The aims of the Member Development Strategy:

- To ensure that every Member has access to the learning and development they need to perform their role and support their electorate
- To outline the roles and responsibilities of Members in relation to their commitment to their professional development
- To outline the roles and responsibilities of officers in the provision of Member development
- To underpin and direct the resources required to deliver the Member Development Strategy
- To promote the importance of learning and development for Members as key element of a Member-Led authority

These aims will be underpinned by the following principles:

- Engage Members in the design of our approach
- Learning objectives will be aligned to the strategic objectives of the organisation

- Development planning will focus on the needs of individuals and build on existing knowledge and skills
- Learning will be designed to be both effective and efficient

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

3.0.1 The Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) Role: to develop and oversee the Member Development Strategy, ensuring that all Members participate in continuous learning ownership for learning strategy, design and delivery. The group is comprised of representatives from all political parties nominated by their group leader – with a representative from each of the following political groups:

- i. Hereford Independents
- ii. Liberal Democrat
- iii. Conservative
- iv. It's our County
- v. Green, and
- vi. True Independents

3.0.2 The MDSG will have overall responsibility to:

- Engage with members individually and collectively to identify their learning needs and priorities
- Work in partnership with officers, where development and training is identified as being delivered in-house by the council, to build the member development strategy, approach and learning content
- Encourage member participation and take up of learning and development opportunities
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy and annual plan
- Explore whether the council's wishes to commit to gaining qualifying status to the Local Governments Association member development charter - and if so – look to gain the necessary accreditation by the next local elections, planned for 2023.

3.1.0 Officers – principally from democratic services – roles:

- To deliver learning and development opportunities.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the member development strategy.

They will:

- Advise and support the Member Development Steering Group
- Lead the review of the Member Development Strategy on a bi-annual basis
- Devise and deliver a comprehensive induction for all Members
- Work in partnership with Members to identify individual learning and development needs
- Co-design and deliver an annual development plan for Members that meets the needs of individuals as well as the Council as a whole
- Support the promotion of available development opportunities
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Member Development Strategy

3.2.0 Members: All members have a personal responsibility to develop and maintain their knowledge and skills that are necessary for them to perform their role effectively. It is incumbent on all members to ensure that they act in compliance with the council’s constitution, as agreed and amended by Members from time to time.

4 Member Development

4.1 Induction and mandatory training:

Mandatory and induction training is provided for all Members to enable them to perform their role effectively. All 53 returning and newly elected members received their mandatory training during May to October 2019, following local elections. Currently members who do not undertake their mandatory training do not receive the higher basic allowance until this is completed.

Committee members are also provided ‘role’ specific training which was designed to support Members to meet their individual knowledge and skills requirements around specific areas of responsibility. For example, Chair and Vice-Chairperson training and committee specific procedures and functions (e.g. full Council and Scrutiny), cabinet members and leader

A survey of all members on their induction and role specific training has been undertaken. A 'What worked well, what could be improved upon' document is being prepared to inform the Council's future induction training programme.

Consideration will also be given to whether additional mandatory training should be implemented during the 4 year term of office.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Using the baseline evidence from the members' development survey, officers will work with the member development and rethinking governance working groups to create an action plan to identify training and development priorities.
- 5.2 A budget has been put in place to resource training and development priorities.
- 5.3 Evaluation of the training and development provided and received by members will be undertaken in 18 months' time.
- 5.4 This Member Development Strategy aims to assess and meet the training and development needs of Councillors in a practical and cost-effective way. The success of its implementation will be dependent on commitment from all members.
- 5.5 Officers of the Council will support Member Development wherever necessary and put into place procedures to assist Members in fulfilling their role.
- 5.6 Clear financial resources will be allocated to support the on-going Member Training and Development Programme. All training and development applies the principles of the Equal Opportunities policy respecting diversity and recognising different needs. Given Members' commitment to training and development, this strategy will help deliver the help and support Councillors need to effectively manage the authority and represent the interests of their communities.

Appendix 1: MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING GROUP

Aims

1. Reporting to the cabinet member, finance and corporate services, the member development and training group will inform the development and monitor the implementation of a planned approach to member development to support members in carrying out their various roles.

Operation

2. The member development and training group will be a cross party group consisting of up to seven members nominated by group leaders.
3. Frequency of meetings shall be quarterly unless otherwise determined by the group.
4. The member development and training group will be supported by the governance team and will consult with group leaders, committee chairmen and the wider member body as appropriate

Terms of reference

5. To recommend to the executive a training programme linked to the aims of the council, and the roles and responsibilities of members (including when appointed to outside bodies), and having regard to best practice elsewhere.
6. To evaluate the effectiveness of the training programme.
7. To recommend to the executive an induction programme for use following whole council elections and for individual councillors following any by election.
8. Following elections, to review the members' induction programme and to identify areas for improvement.
9. To review arrangements for member attendance at external conferences and seminars and make recommendations to the executive to ensure that attendance meets the priorities of the council and that the knowledge gained through attendance is disseminated effectively within the council.