

# **Learning and Development Strategy for Members 2015 - 2019**

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## Foreword

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council recognises Member Development as a priority, and essential to effective political leadership, and the delivery of excellent local government services. Every councillor must understand their role and be equipped with the skills required to carry it out to the highest standard possible.

As a Council, we have always been fully committed to developing our Elected Members so that they are best equipped to serve the community as leaders. We are reinforcing our approach by adopting a learning and development strategy that has been developed by Members, for Members. This Member led approach will ensure that Elected Members and Co-optees are placed at the heart of our approach to Member Learning and Development, support the Council in achieving its aims and objectives and fulfil their responsibilities to the local community.

The strategy provides a variety of Learning and Development opportunities, recognising that Members have numerous demands on their time and require flexible learning opportunities tailored to their specific circumstances. The emphasis on personal support planning means that individual needs and preferences will also be addressed, building on Members' existing skills and knowledge.

Over recent years the role of Councillor has become much more demanding and this will continue as pressures placed on elected members in this changing environment increase. We believe that this strategy will help all Members to fulfil their roles and to continue to build the required leadership capacity at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

Members Advisory Panel

Leader of the Council

## Introduction

The role of an elected Member on Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is key to the effectiveness of the Authority's governance and service delivery and is very demanding and complex. In order to lead the organisation and the communities that the Council services, and to continually improve performance, Members must have access to a dedicated learning and development strategy. Even this Council continues to be fully committed to supporting its Members in fulfilling their representative role.

This Member Development Strategy builds on the successes of former strategies and identifies priorities in respect of Member Learning. It is supplemented by an annual learning and development plan, which details the specific programmes and events which will take place throughout the year. The Council has further demonstrated its commitment to learning and development by achieving the North East Charter Plus Status for Elected Member Development.

This Strategy is based around those principles and is aligned to corporate training strategies in order to provide a co-ordinated approach.

It aims to:

- put Members at the heart of every process connected with their learning and development.
- remove actual and perceived barriers to carrying out duties as an elected Member.
- identify the development needs of individual Members and provide a variety of training methods to meet those needs.
- strengthen and enhance the development and learning culture and encourage participation in learning and development opportunities.
- actively promote learning and development opportunities through traditional and electronic communication methods.
- evaluate learning and development activities in order to ascertain and develop the effectiveness of the strategy as a whole.

These aims will be reviewed and evaluated as part of the annual review of the strategy. Whilst this document is primarily a strategy for learning and developing Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Elected Members, opportunities for participation will also be afforded, where appropriate, Co-opted Members of the Council's Select Committees and also to Town and Parish Councillors.

## 1. The Context of the Strategy

The Learning and Development Strategy for Members details the aims of the Council in relation to its Elected Members. It provides a basis, to ensure that all Members are equipped to carry out their roles effectively by developing the Council's approach to Member Learning and Development.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council acknowledges that there is a continuing need for Councillors to balance the needs of their constituents, political parties/groups and their own personal responsibilities. The Strategy details the dedicated support that is given to elected and co-opted members to help them fulfil their roles and contribute to the success and objectives of the Council.

Many of the challenges facing Stockton are common to the rest of the UK. As the country continues to recover from the global economic downturn it is clear that there will be increased pressure on public spending. With the need to make substantial savings, the authority will have to continue to be more innovative, efficient and outcome focused if it is to continue to improve the quality of life for residents.

Within Stockton there is a unique social and economic mix, with areas of quite acute disadvantage situated alongside areas of affluence. Whilst 29% of the population live within the top twenty per cent of least deprived areas nationally, 27% live in the twenty per cent most deprived areas of England. The Council's strategy for transforming the area for those who live, work and visit here therefore needs to tackle these differences and provide opportunities for all.

With this in mind, this Learning and Development Strategy is a response to the need for elected members to be fully supported in order to be able to fulfil their role at the heart of their communities. It recognises the need to give more effective support to councillors in their roles as community leaders, representatives and advocates, especially within their wards. This could involve:

- Community engagement - active engagement with all parts of the community, empowered and supported to engage with residents and community groups using a range of tools.
- Community advocacy – being a skilled advocate for people from different backgrounds, through access to local intelligence that promotes conversations between communities and local groups / decision makers
- Community development – supporting communities with local projects, educating and information sharing, shaping the local environment and strengthening community action.

This strategy therefore needs to be reflective of any new changes introduced regarding these member roles.

The Council first achieved the requirements of the North East Charter for Elected Member Development in October 2007 and subsequently achieved the Charter Plus requirements in 2012. Charter Plus has been developed by Local Government Improvement and Development and the Regional Employers Organisations as a further level that builds on the main charter requirements, and reflects the growing interest in the wider member development debate, challenging councils to make further achievements in terms of Councillor support, promoting local democracy as well as the approach to member training.

## 2 The Vision and Values

At the heart of any local authority dedicated to meeting the needs of its community there is a visible commitment to the continuous learning and development of its elected members as well as its employees. This Strategy will assist the Council to its vision for Member Learning and Development. All Elected Members are fully committed to Learning and Development and to taking full advantage of and accessing support to learning and development opportunities that will assist them in their role/s and help the Council deliver its corporate priorities for the benefit of the Borough.

To help achieve this vision, the key values that underpin the strategy are:-

1. Personal Support and Development available for all elected and co-opted members
2. Tailored Support and Development based on the identified and agreed needs of the individual elected and co-opted members who will contribute fully to that identification through the Personal Support Planning process
3. Ability to offer a range of delivery methods, locations and times that ensure equality of access for elected or co-opted members' diverse personal circumstances, backgrounds and learning styles
4. Continuous development and support for elected and co-opted members
5. Recognition of transferable skills that Elected and co-opted members have from their workplace and / or life experiences that can be shared to help them and others perform their council role(s)

## 3 The Aims of the Strategy

The Strategy has the following aims:-

1. To encourage a culture whereby Learning & Development is regarded as a component of the ongoing success of Stockton. Providing Members with the support that enables them to perform their vital, individual and joint roles in the democratic processes of local government to an excellent standard.

2. To create a clear framework for the development of elected and co-opted members based upon their individual needs and the needs of the council as a whole.
3. To ensure that elected and co-opted members feel confident to undertake their roles.
4. To ensure that all elected and co-opted members are fully aware of their responsibilities and accountabilities, the principles and standards of conduct in public life, legal requirements and matters of probity.
5. To support the continued development of elected and co-opted members and help them prepare for the roles that they may fulfil in the future.
6. To ensure a consistency of approach to elected and co-opted member development.
7. To evaluate all Learning and Development opportunities to ensure our approach and delivery is cost effective and provides added value in terms of developing the contribution of Members.

## 4 Learning and Development Objectives

All of the following objectives will be guided by local circumstances and requirements and supported by best practice guidance identified by the North East Charter / Charter Plus for Elected Member development:-

1. To achieve full commitment by Officers and Elected Members to Member development.
2. To foster a strategic approach to Member development.
3. To develop an annual Member Learning and Development Programme.
4. To ensure our approach to Member Learning and Development is effective in building capacity.
5. To ensure our approach to Member Learning and Development promotes a healthy work life balance.
6. To support Elected Members in their role as leaders of their local communities

The Charter Plus requires authorities to demonstrate all of the above and also indentify:-

- The impact of Member Development on the work of the local authority and community;
- The need to address wider Councillor support issues as part of the broader development of Councillors' roles;
- The need to promote local democracy and make better links between the tiers of local government.

## 5 Roles and Responsibilities

The following is a list of Members and Officers who have a direct involvement in Member learning and development.

### **Members Advisory Panel**

The role of this Group is to support the development of Member Learning and Development by the Council with its specific terms of reference being identified as follows:

- To support the development of the Member Learning & Development Strategy including the Learning and Development programme for Members.
- Consider specific areas of Member learning and development identified by the Council.
- Assist in the promotion and development of Member Learning & Development within the Council.
- To monitor progress against the North East Charter for Elected Member Development.

### **Individual Members**

All Members will be responsible for:

- Identifying their own Learning & Development needs.
- Communicating their learning and development needs through annual Personal Support Plans or direct to the Principal Development Officer (Member Development.)
- Helping others to learn and develop through sharing of learning.
- Undertaking the necessary training requirements to enable them to serve on the Councils Regulatory Committees and Panels
- Attending mandatory training, particularly in relation to Adults and Children Safeguarding

### **Chief Officers**

- Identify key strategic activities that require Member Development.
- Provide briefings to Members on key areas of service delivery and development.
- Support Member learning and development activities and positively contribute to the Member Development Programme.
- Ensure sufficient budget is available for Member development.
- Support the work of the Member Advisory Panel.

### **Democratic Services**

The Head of Democratic Services will promote and Democratic Services officers will be responsible for:

- Commitment and support to the North East Charter for Elected Member Development.
- The development and evaluation of the Member Learning & Development Strategy.
- The identification of member learning and development requirements and the development of plans to meet them.
- The promotion of member learning and development.
- A suitable infrastructure being put in place to support member learning and development.
- Working collaboratively as appropriate and necessary to facilitate Member Learning and Development.

## 6 Learning and Development Structure

### How Member Development needs will be identified

Member Development needs will be identified and delivered within the main themes of:-

- **Induction**

Prior to an election, all candidates will be provided with a copy of the Member Learning and Development Strategy. Upon election all elected members will be invited and encouraged to participate in the Induction Programme. Induction is fundamental to the effectiveness of elected members in their role and will offer the opportunity to obtain information, advice and guidance that will assist all Members in the fulfilment of their duties and responsibilities. The Induction Programme for Members immediately after the 2015 Local Government Elections has been revised following evaluation of the 2011 programme and examples of best practice from other Local Authorities and a review and assessment of developments nationally, regionally and locally since then.

- **Corporate Training Needs**

The Council will identify Learning and Development events arising from Central Government requirements and Local Policies. Examples may include changes in corporate priorities, new legal requirements, developments in local government services, changes in local government structures or funding, identified areas of service performance requiring scrutiny or challenge and so on. Some of these factors will identify mandatory training requirements e.g. safeguarding training. Member events will be tailored to the subject matter and may include Policy Briefings and Overview Reports to Scrutiny Panels.

- **Role of Members / Identifying Personal Support Needs**

Personal Development is vital and should relate directly to the identified needs that members have highlighted in order to fulfil their roles. To support this the council has established Role Descriptions for all Elected Members, which will provide the basis for the Personal Support Planning process

- **Regulatory Committees**

It is a requirement for all members serving on the Planning and Licensing Committees and the Employee Appeals Panel to receive formal training in relevant procedures and law on an annual basis in order to be eligible to continue to serve as a member of that Committee/Panel. It is expected that any new member to the Committee/Panel will receive an introduction to the work of the Committee/Panel and also be invited to participate in any additional training sessions covering any new areas of procedure that may have been introduced.

- **Community Leadership**

In the changing landscape of Local Government it is becoming increasingly important for Members to take on an enhanced community leadership role. This may include actively engaging with all parts of the community, being a skilled advocate for people from different backgrounds, and supporting communities in their development through local projects.

To ensure that our Members are supported in their role as community leaders it is essential that they have knowledge of, and access to, a range of tools to enable them to engage with their residents, as well as local knowledge and information to facilitate advocacy, signpost, and strengthen community action. As part of this Members will have contact information for the relevant Officers within the Authority to assist them, and a general awareness of Council Policies and procedures that may support them in their representative role.

### **Innovative, Flexible and Imaginative Delivery**

Every effort is made to tailor the approach to Learning and Development to meet the needs of all members, closely linked to their preferred learning styles and when and where learning opportunities are most convenient for Members.

It is key that each Learning and Development activity builds on the momentum, feedback and ideas of Members who have attended similar learning programmes, and is therefore Member led. Other key shapers to our Learning and Development include external reviews and audits. Once the solution to an identified need has been accurately assessed, there is a number of delivery methods which may be used for groups or individuals detailed as follows:-

- Seminars and Briefings
- Courses
- Members Library
- Member Learning and Development intranet site
- Audio Resources
- E-learning
- Interactive DVDs
- Books
- Leadership Academy
- Mentoring

## 7 Equality

The Council values and promotes equality in all activities and services and this is inherent to this strategy. Access to training and development activities are equitable, based upon individual and Council needs. In accordance with the Council's equality scheme and policy, the Council seeks to ensure that Members are not discriminated against on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation in the context of learning and development opportunities.

## 8 Member Mentor

All members, from the newly elected to more senior and experienced, may benefit from peer support and development. For this reason the Authority is committed to support Members in their mentoring activities by providing a formal framework to ensure a consistent approach to the sharing of good practice and peer to peer learning.

Requests for mentoring should be discussed with the Head of Democratic Services.

## 9 Personal Support Plan

Continuous Member learning and development is key for building capacity and ensuring effective political and community leadership. Personal support planning is one of the approaches available to achieve this.

Following the Annual Council Meeting and completion of ~~any~~ induction training Members are encouraged, as part of Stockton's commitment to the North East Charter for Member Learning & Development, to complete a Personal Support Plan (PSP) within their first six months of office. Personal Support plans are completed based on the individuals role(s) and identify support in terms of meeting the learning and development needs that arise from undertaking the role(s).

It is envisaged that a refresh of PSPs will be undertaken annually between May and July where appropriate and will be based primarily on the Role Descriptors previously adopted by Members Advisory Panel. The role descriptors are available on the following link

<http://intranet.stockton.gov.uk/elected-members/member-training-development/>

Approaching Personal Support Planning this way not only ensures Members have appropriate support, but also allows us to plan our use of resources when developing the Member Learning and Development Programme to secure value for money in this area.

## 10 Member Learning & Development Programme

A Member Learning and Development Programme will be provided to support the development of the skills required by Members in fulfilling their roles. Members will identify relevant areas of the programme during the development of their Personal Support Plan. In addition learning and development opportunities may also be developed to address specific circumstances, e.g. new legislation.

The Learning & Development programme offers a mix of learning methods to develop Members and Members are able to choose the method most appropriate to their preferred learning style and personal circumstances.

Members are encouraged to share their learning with others, improving their own performance and that of others. On completion of any Learning & Development activity Members will be requested to complete an evaluation form to assess the impact and effectiveness of their learning experience.

## 11 Information Service

It is essential that in order for both elected and co-opted members to be able to carry out their respective roles that they are provided with the most up to date relevant information from both internal and external sources to the Council; that is easily accessible and presented in an easy to read format.

Members will be provided with a co-ordinated information service by Members Support Officers that will consist of:-

- an office based library facility containing hard copy information of relevant and appropriate local government circulars and advice; along with internal Council documents and journals (please note that the content of this facility is reviewed regularly and any feedback is appreciated);
- an 'electronic' library available from the Council's Intranet system containing details relevant to members respective roles, such as codes of conduct, the Council's Constitution and committee protocols; Council policy documents and corporate guides; and access to all Council, Cabinet and Committee papers and other democratic information via the Council's E-Genda system.

Alerts are provided to members of the latest information made available from each of the above outlets.

In addition, members will also receive copies of the Council's Stockton News publication circulated on four occasions per year, as well as the Council's own internal 'Keeping You In Touch' weekly emagazine which contains the latest topical information regarding all of the Council's services.

## 12 ICT Service

Each elected member is provided with access to ICT facilities at home and, along with co opted members, will have access to ICT facilities within the Council. A dedicated Members ICT Support Officer is available to assist members with their ICT needs so that they can fully utilise the available technology in order to receive and have access to the latest electronic information. In respect of equipment provision within the home, Members will be issued with either a PC and Monitor or Laptop, Printer and Broadband connection. We will also offer Members a Blackberry device.