Supporting Members to make a difference in Stockton-on-Tees 2023 - 2027

Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Contents

Introduction

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is a Council that is ambitious and effective, providing value for money, and has both a workforce and elected membership that are dedicated and resourceful.

It is committed to providing strong leadership and governance and our elected members are integral to this and as such we recognise Member Development as being 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. This strategy recognises this and the need to give effective support to Councillors in their roles as community leaders, representatives and advocates.

We provide a variety of opportunities as part of the Member Development Programme, and we place a continuing emphasis on personal support planning to ensure that individual needs and preferences can be addressed, building upon Members' existing skills and knowledge. We have in place an annual learning and development plan, which details the specific programmes and events which will take place throughout the year, and this will be influenced by corporate priorities and members identified learning needs.

The Council has consistently demonstrated its commitment to learning and development. This Strategy is based around the principles of Charter Plus and is aligned to corporate training strategies in order to provide a co-ordinated approach.

Councillor Bob Cook
Leader of the Council

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-on-Tees. 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.

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.

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 Member Services Team

- 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.

- Support the work of the Member Advisory Panel.

Democratic Services

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

- 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.

Learning and Development Structure

How Member Development needs will be identified

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

- ### Member 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 commences immediately after the 2023 Local Government Elections and has been revised following evaluation of the 2019 programme. It includes 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, and Member events will be tailored to the subject matter and will include monthly Member Briefings and regular 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.

- ### Mandatory Committees

  It is a requirement for all members serving on the following Committees and Panels 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:

  - Planning Committee

  - Licensing Committees

  - Employee Appeals Panel

  - Appeals & Complaints

  - Investigation & Disciplinary Panel

  - Appointments Panel

It is expected that any new member appointed to the above 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.

In addition, it is a requirement for members to receive training on Children's Safeguarding & Corporate Parenting, Adults Safeguarding, and Local Government Finance and Strategic Planning to ensure that they are fully equipped to carry out their duties:

- Local Government Finance and Strategic Planning

- Children's Safeguarding & Corporate Parenting

- Adults Safeguarding

- Equality and Diversity

- Data Protection and Cyber Security

- Health and Safety for Members

- Council Constitution

- Council Procedure and Meeting Procedure Rules

- Current Digital Communication Platforms, inc Teams

• 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. Members will also receive a ward profile outlining demographic information including Experian Mosaic Public Sector (EMPS) profile, level of deprivation, and council service related strategies and how they impact at ward level.

• Leadership Development Programme

In order to encourage members to consider their development into leadership positions, the Council will continue to offer support primarily through the LGA Leadership Academy which is the flagship development programme for councillors in leadership positions. Refreshed and updated for the current challenges faced across local government, the Leadership Academy delivers for local leaders a step change in leadership behaviours, strategies, skills and mind-set.

Members will also be offered the opportunity to attend the LGA's one-day political master classes for councillors who hold leadership positions on their councils including cabinet members, committee chairs and opposition group leaders; and to participate in the LGA's Leadership Essentials programme through a series of themed leadership events and workshops. These are aimed at leading members offering a stand-alone opportunity to concentrate on particular themes and share experiences amongst colleagues dealing with similar challenges

- ## Access to Electronic Information

  The following essential information is available for Members on the Council's intranet system:

  - Staff directories/service charts

  - Committee structure and membership

  - Ward profiles

  - Allowances Scheme, Gifts and Hospitality/Interest Forms,

  - Constitution and procedure rules,

  - Member Training and Development,

  - Events and Resources

  - Press releases

  Members have been provided with ICT provision so that they are each able to access essential Council information 24/7 at a time that suits their own individual needs.

  Committee agendas, reports and minutes can be obtained via the Member Intranet pages, and technology will be available in the near future for Members to ensure that this documentation can be annotated electronically during meetings, thereby realising the potential for a paper less system.

  A suite of free e-learning courses are also available via the Member Intranet system, allowing Members to learn at their own pace at a convenient time and place for themselves. In addition, information from Member Briefing and Development sessions are also available on the Member Intranet pages to ensure that those who were unable to attend still have access to the information.

  Access to information, forms, meeting papers, and training and development opportunities are more readily available electronically, giving Members the tools that they need to carry out their duties at a time that suits them and in turn enable them to respond to residents through a mobile and flexible approach.

- ## 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 delivered at a time that is 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 are a number of delivery methods which may be used for groups or individuals detailed as follows:-

  - Seminars and Briefings

  - Courses

  - Intranet Member Library

  - E-learning Courses

  - LGA Leadership Academy

  - Mentoring

  - Support and advice provided by Members Services

  - 1-1's with Leader of each Political Group

Member Evaluation

The evaluation of Members experiences of attendance at Council provided learning and development opportunities will continue; and will be extended to include member attendance at any external training.

Members views are also sought on the content and future direction of the annual Member Briefing programme, with members specifically asked to evaluate sessions delivered over the last year and suggest topics they would wish to consider over the next year.

Evaluation ensures that the Be a Difference: Member Development Programme meets Councillors aims in terms of raising general awareness of pertinent issues in addition to developing specific skills and knowledge relevant to their roles.

All members have the opportunity to submit development opportunities/suggestions via the dedicated Member Support Service.

Member Briefings

Member Briefings provide an opportunity to increase Councillors knowledge on those key issues affecting Stockton-on-Tees. In addition, the series of briefings have been expanded to address knowledge and understanding of issues facing our external partners and other agencies. These sessions are delivered remotely via Teams

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.

Equality & Diversity training for Members has been scheduled within the Member Development Programme as a mandatory requirement.

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 supporting 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 relevant Group Leader and/or the Head of Democratic Services.

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 induction training Members are encouraged, 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 developed Role Descriptors which seek to define and identify specific skills required.

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.

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.

ICT Support

Each elected member is provided with a choice of corporate mobile tablet/laptop device and smartphone and have access to ICT facilities and support within the Council. A Members ICT Support Officer is available to assist members with their ICT needs so that they can become confident in the use of the technology and be able to access the available systems and information.

Member Services Support

Our Member Support team are responsible for providing support for elected members in the areas of learning and development and community leadership and also both practical and strategic support to elected members that will assist them in fulfilling their respective Councillor roles. Practical support includes the arrangement of ward surgeries; hosting of Councillor web page information, provision of personal stationery/computer supplies, and advice and signposting to the appropriate person(s) within the Council who may be able to assist members with their needs.