

Member Development Strategy 2021-2025



1. Introduction

- 1.1 Somerset County Council is committed to supporting, training and developing its elected members, co-opted and independent members and school appeal panel members as part of the democratic arrangements it supports. It recognises the importance of member support and development in the organisational development of the Council.
- 1.2 The roles of members as strategic leaders for the Council and community leaders at a local level in a modern local authority setting are complex and unique. Members will be encouraged and helped to identify their own development needs and to participate fully in activities through self-help and direct assistance. The Council's Member Development Panel will help to set training priorities for their peers and review outcomes – this will help the Council to adopt a planned approach to member development based on supporting the delivery of corporate priorities and actual rather than perceived need and will ensure that the correct training opportunities are delivered.
- 1.3 The on-going development of the Council's elected members is a key element of the organisational development of the Council as a whole, and a structured targeting of resources increases the efficiency and effectiveness of members at individual, role specific and strategic levels. This Member Development Policy and Strategy builds on previous strategies and is intended to help ensure that access to training and development activities is equitable and enables members to perform their current duties as well as preparing them for supporting the Council to meet future challenges. It also gives members the opportunities to:
 - Make use of self-development / e-learning opportunities via both internal sources such as The Learning Centre as well as outside sources such as webinars
 - Take advantage of virtual learning opportunities via Microsoft Teams or other online meeting software
 - Develop through learning opportunities via member networking with other authorities and through the Local Government Association
 - Learn from their member peers within their political groups
 - Where appropriate, learn alongside the Council's officers through 'buddying' and 'mentoring' opportunities
- 1.4 It is also intended that elements of this strategy apply to co-opted members of committees and panels including school appeal panel members who require role specific training.

1.5 Training and development opportunities will be provided regardless of any disabilities, ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexuality, religious or physical circumstances.

2. The Council's Vision

2.1 The County Plan highlights the continuing priorities for the Council to create:

- A thriving and productive County that is ambitious, confident and focussed on improving people's lives.
- A County of resilient, well-connected and compassionate communities working to reduce inequalities.
- A County where all partners actively work together for the benefit of our residents, communities and businesses and the environment in which we all live.
- A County that provides you with right information, advice and guidance to help you help yourself and targets support to those who need it most.

Members will be at the front line of this drive and this Strategy will be key to enabling members and the Council to deliver better outcomes for Somerset.

3. Aims

3.1 The aims of this Member Development Policy and Strategy are:

- To ensure that newly elected members are inducted into the role of councillor effectively and efficiently and are able to play a full role in delivering the Council's vision and aims as set out in the County Plan;
- To enable members to carry out their roles efficiently and effectively at all times and be kept informed of new legislation and national policy changes;
- To ensure that members have a broad awareness of the commissioning and operational structures and functions of the Council as well as how the Council works and takes decisions;
- To ensure it is flexible and capable of being adjusted to reflect changing circumstances;
- To support the Council's "think local councillor" protocol and how members can deliver their community leadership roles
- To develop members' knowledge and skills in order for them to deal effectively with their constituency casework;
- To ensure that relevant members including co-opted members and school appeal panel members receive training where this is a statutory requirement, eg for those members of Regulation Committee involved in decision making on planning and rights of way issues and school appeals

- To make the best use of the resources available to support our elected members;
- To ensure the Council provides good quality member development (external accreditation is through the Charter for Member Development).

4. Expectations of members

- 4.1 The Council has recognised the importance of training and development by deciding to make some elements of the training mandatory for both newly elected members of Council and returning councillors in order to deliver their roles effectively. The Council's expectation is that each member will take personal responsibility for their own development and commit to take advantage of the training and opportunities on offer.
- 4.2 Where training is provided for members of a Committee, for example, then the members of that Committee will be required to attend the training including returning councillors. If they do not attend, then their position as a member of that Committee will be reviewed with their Political Group Leader and they may be removed from membership of that Committee if appropriate training is not completed. The Member Development Panel will review all non-attendance of training and make recommendations to Group Leaders and the Monitoring Officer.
- 4.3 It is expected that members who are re-elected will help guide newly elected members through the process of induction to the Council and provide peer support.

5. Priorities

- 5.1 The priorities for training and development for our elected members will be identified at three different levels
- 5.1.1 *Individual needs*
There will be opportunities to discuss training needs through a personal learning development process for individual members. These opportunities will be prioritised for newly elected members and to support specific roles e.g. Committee Chairs, Cabinet Members, Opposition Spokespersons, etc. In addition to this, members have the opportunity to pursue individual e-learning through The Learning Centre. Some of this will also include remote working and members will need or to acquire a certain level of IT skills and access to adequate internet connectivity to be able to partake in these activities.
- 5.1.2 *Role specific*
Each member role will have a Role Description (as defined in the Council's Constitution) which will assist in identifying potential areas of training need. Generic committee-specific issues may also be identified e.g. Committee Chair training or regulatory training for Regulation Committee members. Any member whose role changes will be given support in their new role.

5.1.3 *Strategic & Corporate priorities*

Lead members and officers, through the Council's business planning processes, will anticipate the effects of impending changes and initiate the requirement for elected member training.

- 5.2 The MDP may influence these priorities through regular review and also through their annual assurance that this is being undertaken. The MDP will make any necessary recommendations to the Council's Senior Leadership Team via the Monitoring Officer.

6. Supporting Member Development Priorities

- 6.1 Member Development Panel members are ambassadors for member training and development within their own political groups and within the Council.

The Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Team directly support member development and manage the programme of training on an annual basis. This support and training covers all committees, boards or panels that are administered by the team including those that include partner organisations eg. Somerset Waste Board, Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel. It also covers support for co-opted and independent members as well as volunteer panel members for school appeal hearings.

- 6.2 The majority of training and development opportunities will be provided in-house by officers across council services. It is essential to have the support and assistance of skilled officers in different service areas especially from those in ICT.

There is also the potential to utilise the skills and knowledge of more experienced members or former elected members by involving them in the delivery of the induction programme or specific member development sessions.

- 6.3 Where it is considered essential to bring in external training providers, this will be done cost-effectively through, for example, the provision of joint training with other local authorities or by bringing in local training providers to work with groups of members or participating in a Shared Member Development Service with several councils in the south west and other network opportunities.

- 6.4 The Council's budget for member development will be reviewed annually by the Member Development Panel along with the priorities for the forthcoming financial year. Following review, the MDP may make recommendations to the Cabinet as part of the Council's annual budget setting process, to ensure the aims and priorities in this strategy are met or if there are any impacts from potential reductions.

7. Delivery

- 7.1 Responsibility for ensuring the Member Development Policy and Strategy is implemented and delivered rests with the Cabinet Member for Resources, and the Strategic Manager – Governance & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer for the Council), following consultation with the Member Development Panel and the Senior Leadership Team. Officers within the Democratic Services deal with the day-to-day issues and organising support.
- 7.2 A planned approach to member development based on identified needs will be adopted. The Member Development Panel will be actively involved in determining the priorities and the learning opportunities available in order to meet corporate priorities, and also in evaluating the feedback and outcomes of the sessions for future planning. Member training will also be reviewed annually by the Monitoring Officer and reported to the Senior Leadership Team to ensure senior officers contribute to and monitor members' training needs as well as informing the annual member development programme.
- 7.3 Development opportunities will be delivered through a variety of methods and at locations and times that as far as possible ensure equality of access for all members. There will be a number of opportunities available online or via virtual methods to enable greater access.
- 7.4 Wherever possible, information about training events and seminars will be published at least two months in advance and appropriately publicised.
- 7.5 A member induction process will be provided to members following elections / by-elections. This will be aimed specifically at new members of the Council but will also provide opportunities for refresher training for experienced members re-elected to office. In the event of a by-election a tailored induction programme will be delivered to the newly elected member. Where possible, there will be multiple opportunities for mandatory / statutory training to ensure members complete this. At the earliest opportunity new members will be invited to highlight any needs or disabilities so that additional support and reasonable adjustments can be made.
- 7.6 New members will also be offered support of a mentor or 'buddy' who will offer help and guidance such as informing them of council processes or signposting them to the appropriate officer for assistance.
- 7.7 Training and development opportunities will be provided throughout the quadrennium based around an annual programme. A range of training delivery methods will be looked at for these sessions including:
- In-house briefings and workshops
 - E-learning and written material
 - Peer and Officer mentoring / shadowing
 - Personal Development Plans

- Virtual meeting training sessions
- External training, courses and conferences
- Site visits to see service delivery and innovation

7.8 In the main member training will be provided in-house and where possible through the use of e-learning or virtual meetings as the preferred method. There may be a requirement for some external provision depending on the topic and the level of in-house expertise and capacity available to deliver training. On occasion, training opportunities may be planned and delivered with neighbouring councils and partner organisations.

7.9 Where appropriate, lead members may be authorised to participate in accredited external training courses e.g. Local Government Association courses.

8. Evaluation

8.1 Evaluation of training will be coordinated through the Democratic Services team in a number of ways:

- Providing members with opportunities to give feedback following training sessions e.g. questionnaires. Personal development plans will allow individuals to comment on how their training increases their personal effectiveness in their member role.
- We also offer exit interviews with members to assess, among other issues, how well they were supported in their roles while serving.
- The Member Development Panel will maintain an overview of evaluation outcomes and of members' attendance at / participation in training events.

8.2 The Strategy itself to be reviewed on an annual basis by the Panel and updated as necessary and any recommendations to be made to the Monitoring Officer, Cabinet Member / Cabinet and to Full Council.

9. Outcomes

9.1 By developing our elected members' co-opted members and school appeal panel members potential, the most positive outcome will be their engagement and involvement in Council activities, and their contribution to delivering good quality services to Somerset residents.

9.2 They will understand their roles and responsibilities better, and have the skills, knowledge and confidence to undertake their duties more efficiently and effectively. They will be receiving required training on statutory obligations, and will be aware of legal requirements, matters of probity and changes to legislation.

9.3 Resources, activities and processes will be regularly monitored to ensure effectiveness and value for money, and that the aims of the Member Development Policy and Strategy will be delivered.

Contact Officers:

Scott Wooldridge, Strategic Manager Governance & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer for the Council)

Julia Jones, Governance Specialist - Democratic Services

01823 357628

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