

**Member Development Strategy
2024/25**



firststart

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Purpose

1. Many people who are elected as Members have their own political views and core social values. Those in political groups will receive leadership and support from their own group.
2. This strategy outlines the support that will be given to Councillors and any Co-opted Members to help them fulfil their roles and contribute to the delivery of the Council's strategic objectives. It will ensure that a long-term view is taken of Member Development but is also one which can flex to fit changing needs and priorities.
3. This strategy recognises that Councillors are not employees of the Council and strives to help them seek a balance between their demanding roles, both inside, and outside, of the Council.

Vision and Values

4. The vision for the Member Development Strategy is that all Councillors, and any co-opted Members, have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform effectively and efficiently in their current roles, and to be able to develop those skills/knowledge for future roles in the Council. To help achieve this vision, the key values that underpin the Strategy are:
 - Development opportunities will be available to all Councillors and Co-opted Members irrespective of political allegiance
 - Member development will be based on the identified and agreed needs of the individual Councillor or Co-opted Member through their participation in the Member Development Plan (MDP) process
 - Member development will be delivered through methods, at locations, and at times, that ensure equality of access for Councillors or Co-opted Members' personal circumstances, backgrounds and learning styles
 - The Council has a learning culture that sees continuous development and life-long learning for Councillors and Co-opted Members as vital to its success
 - The Council acknowledges that Councillors and any Co-opted Members may have transferable skills from their work place and/or life experiences that can be used to help them perform their Council role

Aims

5. The Strategy has the following aims:
 1. To create a clear framework for the development of Councillors and Co-opted Members based on their individual needs and the needs of the Council as a whole
 2. To ensure that all Councillors and Co-opted Members have the skills at a level that is suitable for their roles and responsibilities
 3. To ensure Councillors have the skills and knowledge necessary to oversee the delivery of high quality public services by the Council through their community leadership
 4. To ensure that Councillors and Co-opted Members feel confident and motivated to undertake their roles
 5. To ensure that Councillors and Co-opted Members are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, legal requirements and matters of good practice as a means of delivering good governance
 6. To support the continued development of Councillors and Co-opted Members and help prepare them for roles that they may fulfil in the future
 7. To ensure a consistency of approach to Member development
 8. To attract and retain high calibre Councillors from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible

Governance of the Strategy

6. Member development must be undertaken and managed if this strategy is to be successful. To do this, it is vital that Councillors play an integral part in the management of the development programme. The Member Learning and Development Sub-Committee will advise the Council on all Member Development matters, through the Standards and Audit Committee, and will evaluate the programme of Member Development to ensure that it is responsive to Members' needs as follows:

- At least once a year, the Sub-committee will evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of this strategy. If necessary, it will be updated to take account of lessons learned, Member feedback, latest developments and best practice.
- Where possible, Members will be asked to complete evaluation forms after each training session in the core programme either via a paper form at the session or electronically afterwards. Members attending externally provided courses will be encouraged to provide feedback to the Council on them to ensure that value for money is obtained.
- Member Development Plan (MDP) meetings will be offered to all new Councillors within 6 months of their election with a review taking place annually afterwards or earlier, on request. The review meeting will include an opportunity for Members to comment on the training provided since their initial review and to assess the impact training has had on their ability and capacity to carry out their role, and any ongoing benefits.
- During the year at least one comprehensive survey of Members will be undertaken to investigate a range of issues relating to their needs and their views of the services provided for them.
- Where appropriate, exit interviews will be undertaken with Members who have resigned or who are not seeking re-election to determine whether Member Development opportunities contributed to their decision. Evaluation and feedback will be analysed and will inform the provision of Member training and will shape future policies. Each year, the sub-committee will review the feedback that is received in respect of Member Development and share this information with other Councillors, and if necessary, with Cabinet.

Member Learning and Development Sub-Committee (MLDSC)

7. The Strategy is owned by the Council as a whole. However, it will be the responsibility of the MLDSC and the Democratic/Member Services team to ensure that the Strategy is reviewed and updated to reflect any changes arising from external and internal factors, and that it continues to be fit for purpose.

Role and Composition

8. The MLDSC will include representatives from all the political groups that make up the Council, with officer support being provided by a Democratic Services Officer. The Group will meet a minimum of 2 times a year to agree and review training and development for Councillors and any Co-opted Members. The main purpose of the MLDSC is to:

- To champion and promote learning and development among members
- To develop a Member Development Plan, based on Council and individual priorities, and undertake timely reviews to measure progress of the Plan
- To identify and develop suitable learning opportunities to ensure that development needs are met, including the Member Induction Programme and support throughout the term of office
- To evaluate the quality of training to ensure that training is delivered to a consistently high standard and offers value for money and make recommendations to the Executive, the Council or its committees as appropriate.
- Provide strong leadership and guidance in respect of Member Development.

- Ensure that learning and development is effective in building capacity and ensuring that Councillors have the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their community leadership roles effectively.
- To ensure equal access for all Councillors to training and development and to promote the use of information technology for and by Members.

Identifying Member Development Needs

9. Member development needs will be identified as follows:

1. Corporate Training Needs

The environment in which local government operates may change frequently and fundamentally. This is because of changes in the law, corporate priorities, or changes to local government services/structures. The Council must be alert to these changes and be ready to adapt its learning and development to suit every circumstance, and to fill any gaps in skills and knowledge that arise.

Member Development Strategy

2. Role of Members

It is vital that Member Development and this Strategy relate directly to the roles and duties that Members have to fulfil. To ensure this, the Council has developed a number of Role Descriptions for Councillors which are included in the Council's Constitution. The MLDSC will ensure that there is a programme of development that enables Councillors and Co-opted Members to have the skills and knowledge to fulfil the specific roles identified. Each newly elected Councillor or Co-opted Member will be invited to participate in an induction programme relevant to their role.

3. Specialist Role Needs

Many Members will have additional roles that they currently carry out, or roles that they aspire to, in the future, and these will require specialist or more focused training. These roles include:

- Chairman or Vice-Chairman of Committees or Sub-Committees
- Leadership, for example Leader of the Council or Leader of a Political Group
- Cabinet Member or Shadow Portfolio Holders
- Regulatory Committees such as Licensing and Planning which exercise quasi-judicial functions
- Scrutiny
- Audit and Governance
- Civic and ceremonial protocols

4. Identifying Personal Development Needs

The skills needed to carry out the roles listed in 1 – 3 above set out the training needs for Councillors. However, for a truly effective training needs analysis which identifies specific development needs for individual Members, a more in-depth discussion is needed on a one-to-one basis. This can best be achieved through participation in the MDP process.

This involves:

- Participation in an individual Member Development Plan meeting where Councillors can identify any gaps in their skills / knowledge to inform their development needs.

- Considering other relevant, necessary skills eg presentational skills, speed reading, public speaking etc.
- Discussions with Political Group Leaders or the Democratic Services Team.
- Reviewing the impact of learning and development through the MDP process as well as feedback received through course evaluation.
- Councillors maintaining their own personal development / training records and regularly reviewing if there any gaps in their skills / knowledge. Based on the above, an overall Member Development Programme will be developed each year but will be reviewed by the MLDS on a regular basis to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of Members and the Council.

How Development Needs will be Met

10. To support the diverse development needs of Councillors and Co-opted Members, a range of options will be made available to suit different learning styles and individual circumstances. In some cases, these can be delivered through the Council's own internal resources or, where necessary, specialist providers with a proven track records in terms of training will be brought in. Potential development delivery methods may include:

- Training courses
- Informal in-house briefings and workshops, including joint Member / officer training where appropriate
- External conferences and seminars
- Member briefings
- Written learning materials
- Peer Mentors
- E-Learning packages
- Distance learning packages
- Visits to other Councils or relevant partners
- Shadowing opportunities
- Sharing of knowledge amongst other Elected Members
- Personal research or preparation for specific projects.

11. Councillors will be encouraged to be involved in Member Development, where appropriate, by leading workshops, disseminating expert knowledge, offering mentoring or by encouraging the take-up of Member Development opportunities. The delivery of these activities will also be considered as contributing towards a Member's own continued professional development and can be a method of achieving goals identified on their specific Member Development Plan.

Support for New Members

12. The following specific support will be offered to new Councillors:

- After the elections, each new Councillor will be provided with an Induction Guide providing a more detailed introduction to the Council and practical information about being a Councillor.
- A comprehensive Induction Programme will be provided to ensure that newly-elected Councillors can quickly participate fully in the business of the Council. This will include an opportunity to meet senior officers, find out about the Council's key priorities, be given information to get them started and receive basic training on key areas such as the Code of Conduct.
- Details of the Democratic Services Team will be given to provide support with information and signposting.

- Councillors who have been elected at by-elections will be provided with a similar Induction Programme and support.
- New Councillors will be offered a tour of key locations across Thurrock
- New Councillors will also be offered a Member Development Plan meeting within 6 months of being elected to identify any specific training needs. In addition, the Member Support Scheme (Appendix A) provides for a Democratic or Member Services Officer to be assigned to a newly elected Member immediately following the election. Members can also request peer support and/or mentoring by a more experienced Member which is particularly helpful for newly-elected colleagues as well as those Councillors stepping into key roles. This provides development benefits for both the mentor and the mentee.

Resourcing

13. Each year, the MLDSC will identify the budget and resources that are needed to support Member Development and will refer any recommendations for the Member Development budget to Full Council (as part of the annual budget review process). These resources will be monitored by the MLDSC and include:

- Financial budget allocation and other capacity to support Member Development activities
- Member support from within the Democratic Services Team
- Conference / Seminar attendance by specific postholders e.g. Cabinet Members, Group Leaders, Chairmen of Committees etc
- Opportunities for cross-authority / partner training on a countywide, regional or national basis
- Specific training programmes provided by national / regional course providers e.g. Local Government Association, South East Employers etc.
- Relevant opportunities for learning through seminars, conferences or visits hosted by partners.

The budget for Member Development for 2023/24 is £xxxx

Appendix A - Member Support Scheme

14. The Member Support Scheme provides Councillors with a named contact from Democratic & Member Services following their election. In addition, if requested, a peer Mentor who is usually a Councillor from their own political group, can be assigned to help with signposting and providing advice on all issues affecting the life of a Councillor.
15. The Scheme is not designed to replace the direct contact and access that all Councillors can expect when they wish to speak to their Group Leaders, the Chief Executive, Directors or Heads of Services. It is also not intended that it will create personal assistants or research assistants for individual Councillors as this work is undertaken by Political Assistants.
16. Democratic & Member Services and Mentors can offer support and advice, especially during the first year after a Member is elected or if they have been appointed to a new role, and can help the Councillor understand the requirements of the role and develop their confidence. The Member Support Scheme enables Councillors to:
 - be more aware of where to go for information and support
 - feel more confident in their representative and decision-making roles
 - be able to make an early contribution to the work of the Council and representing their local community.
17. If Members need factual information about Council services and details about who to contact within the Council, or any other day to day information about Council business, contact can be made with their named Democratic or Member Services Officer or anyone within the Democratic Services Team.
18. What can a Councillor expect from their named Democratic Services Officer or a Mentor?
 - A friendly response to questions however trivial they may seem
 - Support and advice from the Officer/Mentor's personal knowledge and experience
 - Signposting to an appropriate officer or Councillor to take forward a query as needed – this will usually be at service head or team leader level for any new service enquiry or it could be a Cabinet Member
 - A sounding board to help the Councillor reflect on new experiences and issues raised
 - A response to emails and telephone calls as promptly as possible and to be advised who will respond to queries if the Democratic Services Officer/Mentor is away for an extended period of time
 - A prompt response to requests to meet with the Democratic/Member Services Officer/Mentor
19. How and when is a named Officer or Peer Mentor assigned?
20. The named Officer will be appointed immediately following the election and will contact the new Councillor within the first day or so after the Count. Once notified of a request for a Peer Mentor, the Democratic Services Officer will contact Political Group Leaders to ask for a nomination as soon as practicable. The Member Support Scheme is informal and intended to be helpful, therefore, Councillors can make as much or as little use of it as they wish.

Appendix B – Member Development Strategy Action Plan – to be developed

Strategy Theme	Action	Intended Outcome	Date Completed
Develop 2024/25 Member Training Schedule to align with corporate and Member role requirements			February 2024
Develop and introduce Personal Member Development Plan (PDP)	Create a file for each Member which records their training to date. Liaise with each Member to identify their transferable skills, training needs and aspirations.		November 2023
Develop continual development opportunities for Individual Members	Through the MLDSC and the PDP process to liaise with Members to develop particular streams of continual development opportunities for certain members with specialist roles and to build future skills planning		February 2024
Develop Member Zone online to support online learning and resource repository	Review the current online offer and suggest ways to improve the section and use it to its full effect, including previously recorded content.		December 2023