

Member Development Strategy 2025/26



Contents

	Page
Purpose	3
Vision and values	3
Aims	3
Management of the strategy	4
Member Learning & Development Sub Committee	4
Roles and composition	4
Identifying member development needs	5
How development needs will be met	6
Support for new members	6
Resourcing	7
Appendix A - Member Support Scheme	8
Appendix B – Action Plan	9
Appendix C – Member Role Descriptions	10

Revision HistoryVersion Number	Description	Date Modified	Author
1.0	Draft	17/7/23	Matt Boulter
2.0	Draft for Standards Committee Approval	08/11/24	Matt Boulter

Contributors and Reviewers

Name	Position / Role
Chris Stephenson	Governance & Scrutiny Programme Manager

Approvals

Prepared by		Agreed by	
Name	Matt Boulter	Name	
Position	Head of Democratic Services	Position	
Date	30/11/24	Date	

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 Profile (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. This will be achieved by raising the profile of Member Development through i) regular engagement with the Standards Committee, ii) promotion of the MDPs as a tool for Members to track and manage their personal development alongside officers and iii) promote political group leaders to use the MDPs to support their Members in all aspects of skills development.
 - 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 Standards Committee will advise the Council on all Member Development matters 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 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.

Role of Standards Committee

7. The Strategy is owned by the Council as a whole. However, it will be the responsibility of the Standards Committee 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 Standards Committee includes representatives from all the political groups that make up the Council, with officer support being provided by a Democratic Services Officer. The Committee will agree and review training and development for Councillors and any Co-opted Members. The main purpose of the committee's role on this issue 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.

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 Standards Committee 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 Profile/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 Profile.

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 Profile 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 Standards Committee 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).

- 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 2025/26 is £5000

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?

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

Strategy Theme	Action	Intended Outcome	Date Completed / Review Date
Develop and strengthen the use of Member Development Profiles	Liaise with political assistants and group whips to ensure all members have a one to one meeting with their group leadership to ensure they have identified any personal training needs. These are to be logged on their profile.	More intelligence being received from Members throughout the year to allow the training programme to respond to in-year and emerging training needs.	March 2026 (with review throughout 2025/26)
Create a yearly plan for external training opportunities to ensure that Members have information and opportunity to attend external training opportunities (within budget limits)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Political assistants to work with groups to create a list of desired external training opportunities. - Member and Democratic Services to create advanced list of LGA/LGiU/CfGS training courses to share with groups. 	Members have access to a more varied and specialised training suite to develop skills in specialist and current issues.	August 2025
Implement feedback activity to allow Members to i) assess the training programme, ii) assess the productivity/impact of their committee and iii) assess the performance of the chair.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Send online and anonymous surveys to Members for completion. -Evaluate and collate responses -Share with chairs and members as appropriate 	Improve Member engagement with the development of personal and committee performance.	April/May 2025
Implement exit surveys for retiring Members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Send online survey to retiring Members -Evaluate and collate responses -Share with Standards Committee as part of regular reporting 	Improve Member engagement with the development of personal and committee performance.	May 2025

Appendix C - Role Descriptions

Chair

The main functions of this role are:

Chairing

1. Can confidently, and orderly, lead a Committee meeting and its Members through an agenda in a public facing setting;
2. Can facilitate conversations within a time limited environment ensuring all voices are heard, no matter how challenging;
3. Can set a positive and productive tone even in challenging circumstances.

Leading the Committee Function

1. A visible, respected leader within and outside the organisation who advocates for good scrutiny and a culture of openness, transparency and securing good outcomes for the people of Thurrock;
2. To have strong individual and collective relationships with the Deputy, Committee Chairs, Executives, other chairs and Commissioners and officer community across the Council and key partners;
3. Has a clear grasp of the strategic issues facing Thurrock (the Council and the place) and is able translate that into relevant action.

Developing the Committee's Work Programme and Advocating Best Use of Available Resources

1. Ability to convene a diverse set of internal and external stakeholders (elected, officer and appointed) towards a shared set of priorities and outcomes;
2. To work in concert with officers to rigorously prioritise, and ultimately reprioritise, the workload of the Committee and its Members in a dynamic fashion;
3. To personally maintain an overview / watching brief of the strategic dimensions of Council business and issues facing Thurrock to develop own understanding and support the understanding of others.

Vice Chair

1. To fulfil all the functions above and especially so in the event of the Chair's absence;
2. To be a close and trusted support to the Chair.

Committee Member

Attendance at Meetings

Consistent attendance at, and continuous engagement between, meetings;

Provide active, informed comments and questions to drive understanding and scrutiny of key areas of interest;

Chairing a Task & Finish Review or sub-committee where needed on a time limited basis into an issue of relevance to the Committees work programme.

Developing the Committee's Work Programme and Advocating Best Use of Available Resources

To contribute to the development of the Committee's work programme taking ownership of items put forward balancing evidence, rigorous prioritisation and resource demands on the Committee and its Members' wider agenda.

To personally maintain an overview / watching brief of the strategic dimensions of Council business and issues facing Thurrock to develop own understanding and support the understanding of others based on former Chairmanship role.

Representing the Committee Function

A visible, respected leader within and outside the organisation who advocates for good application of the function of the committee (standards, O & S and others) and a culture of openness, transparency and securing good outcomes for the people of Thurrock.

DRAFT