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# Member Development Strategy

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# Member Development Strategy 2023 - 2027

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## 1. Introduction

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District Councillors are first and foremost community leaders representing the ward in which they were elected. The work of a councillor also includes decision making, developing and reviewing policy, considering issues such as planning applications and ensuring that businesses comply with the law.

Elected members are also accountable for the delivery of the objectives within the Council Plan and this relies on them having the key skills and knowledge to help provide the best possible services to residents and support to our communities.



Stroud District Council recognises the importance of learning and development and is committed to providing high quality development to its elected members. This member development strategy will ensure that every member has access to the appropriate learning and development they need to effectively fulfil every aspect of their role, now and in the future.

## 2. Objectives and Aims

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This strategy sets out the Council's commitment to supporting members with their development, and details how we will equip elected representatives with the skills and knowledge they need to fulfil their various roles effectively and to the best of their abilities. It also covers how we will identify development needs; the ways in which members can participate in continuous learning and development; and how we will evaluate and measure the success of all learning.

The overarching aim of the strategy is, therefore, to ensure there is support for all members to enable them to acquire sufficient knowledge and a full range of skills to maximise their ability and capacity.

Arising from this overarching aim, the following principles will underpin how member development is delivered.

### Principles

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**Members will be offered opportunities** to acquire the knowledge, skills and expertise they need to perform their role effectively

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**Members will be encouraged to take responsibility** for and actively seek opportunities for their own learning and development

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**Training and development applies to all members**, even those that have been members for some time and feel there is nothing new to learn

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Members who take advantage of the opportunities available will be **actively encouraged and supported**

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The objectives of the Member Development Strategy are to:

1. **Ensure all members have consistent and equal access to training and development opportunities that take into account different learning styles:**
    - a. Ensure all newly elected members are properly inducted to the Council;
    - b. Ensure compliance with mandatory training;
    - c. Offer the opportunity to participate in continuous development through a variety of methods;
    - d. Provide training and development at different times and in different ways to ensure equality of opportunity.
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- 2. Provide support for all members to acquire sufficient knowledge and a full range of skills to fulfil all their duties confidently and effectively:**
  - a. Encourage all members to take advantage of the learning and development opportunities available;
  - b. Ensure members are able to perform any 'special responsibilities';
  - c. Ensure members feel confident to undertake their roles;
  - d. Support the continued development of councillors to prepare them for roles they may fill in the future.
- 3. Ensure mechanisms are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the development programme:**
  - a. Provide a clear framework for councillor development based upon individual and organisational needs
- 4. Obtain South West Council's Charter Status accreditation for Councillor Development**

### 3. Member Development Working Group

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Importantly, this is a member led and informed strategy. The Member Development Working Group (MDWG) was established to oversee the Member Development Strategy to ensure that development is member led and is accountable to the council, supported and advised by council officers.

The Working Group is a cross party group and includes councillors of varied positions including committee chairs and vice chairs, Group Leaders, long serving councillors and councillors elected at the last local elections.

The MDWG has renewed our commitment to supporting Members with their development needs and will ensure that the programme of activities for the 2024 cohort offers learning in a range of topics and skills catered for them.

Along with the Member Development Strategy, the MDWG will have responsibility for:

- Encouraging member participation and take up of learning and development opportunities;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy and update as required to ensure it continues to meet members' needs; and
- Engaging with members individually and collectively to identify their learning needs and priorities.

### 4. Member Induction and Development Programme

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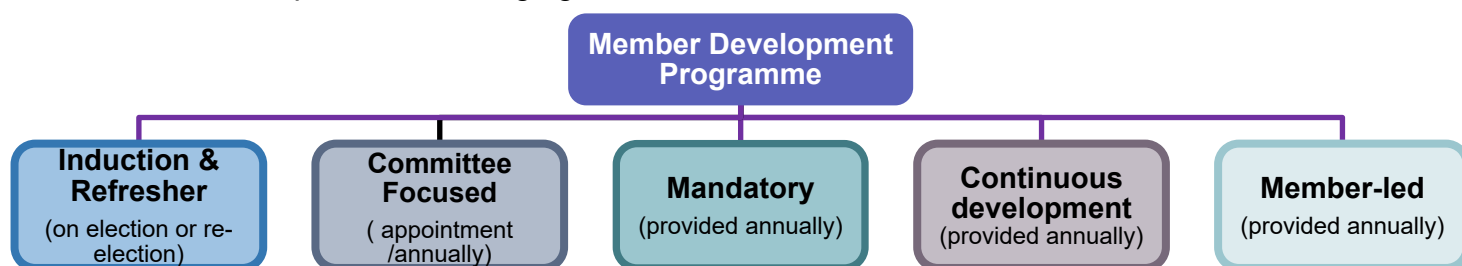
Following the whole council elections in 2021, a comprehensive Member Induction Programme was provided for a large number of new Members. Many opportunities arose from delivering the training and support online but there were also some learning points, particularly, regarding the types of learning available; 'overload' of information; and adapting training and guidance to suit members with all levels of understanding and experience.

The MDWG has reviewed the member development offer and Induction Plan for 2021 and considered the lessons learnt from the feedback provided by Members. This has informed

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our approach to learning content, induction, member development sessions, training delivery and personal development planning.

The Member Induction and Development Programme for 2024 will be delivered via an induction of concentrated activity over the first 6 months, followed by ongoing targeted training and support for the remainder of the four-year term. The Programme will be flexible in order to adapt to meet changing needs.



## 4. 1 Induction and Refresher Programme

It is recognised that the period following an election can be challenging and overwhelming for returning councillors and newly elected councillors in particular. Considerable learning is required during a condensed period. During this period, it is key that councillors receive the right level of information and support and help they need. The induction programme has therefore been spread across a number of weeks so it doesn't feel quite so onerous.

The programme for new and returning councillors is relevant for all members and will consist of a wide range of sessions providing overviews, legislative and policy updates to all key council areas to include:

- Committee specific (including regulatory) sessions
- Guidance and support for Councillors undertaking specific roles e.g chairing meetings
- Council priorities
- The Council's budget
- Opportunities to meet and senior officers.
- Personal Development Plans

Some training events will highlight whether the training is 'mandatory' or 'strongly recommended' to help members prioritise attendance at training.

The Induction and Refresher Programme for 2024 is attached to this strategy at Appendix A.

## 4.2 Committee Specific

Whilst all training and induction sessions are open to all members, all training opportunities including induction and continuous development will be associated with a relevant committee where possible. The intention of this is to help members to focus their training and development on their key areas of work and to support the delivery of committee work programmes.

The Induction and Refresher Programme will therefore be provided as a list of events in date order, another version of the Programme will also show each event categorised by Committee so members can view the training that might be most important to them.

Committee members are also provided ‘role’ specific training which is designed to support members to meet their individual knowledge and skills requirements around specific areas of responsibility. For example, Chair and Vice Chair training.

### 4.3 Mandatory Training

There is small amount of training that must be completed by all members:

Session	When	Type of Training	Purpose
Code of Conduct	Every 2 years or when Code of Conduct changes	In person or E-Learning	All members are required to attend this training to be aware of the framework within which they must operate and the expected behaviours and actions of being an elected member.
Safeguarding	Within first 12 months of elected term	E-Learning	This training covers the legislative framework and legal expectations of elected members in relation to safeguarding. The training will help develop knowledge of how to recognise, report and record concerns about a child or adult at risk.
Equality Act 2010	Within first 12 months of elected term	E-Learning	This training will help members fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and public sector equality duty (note: additional EDI&E training on various topics is also provided annually).
GDPR / Information Governance	Annual	E-Learning	This training is to make members aware of their obligations under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information laws.
IT Security	Annual	E-Learning	To ensure Members are aware of the importance in making sure all online activity is undertaken securely and the common threats the council faces from cyber-crime.

In addition to this, there is mandatory training for members of certain committees:

Committee	Training	When	Purpose
Development Control	DCC training	Before first DCC committee in the civic year	It is necessary for all DCC members to complete training on planning policy and decision making before their first DCC committee and to complete an annual refresh.
Community Services and Licensing	Licensing and Associated Hearings training	Annually	In order to effectively administer the licensing system, it is crucial that members are fully trained before sitting on this committee.

Audit and Standards (and open to all members)*	Notice of Possession Proceedings (NOPP)	Annually	To ensure we can meet our regulatory obligations, members are trained to be able to attend Housing Review Panels as part of our anti-social behaviour policy. These review panels deal with serious anti-social behaviour regarding council tenants.
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\* Please note that due to Housing Committee members being unable to sit on this Panel, it is necessary to open this training outside of Audit and Standards Committee to ensure that enough members are trained to sit on the Panel.

## 4.4 Continuous Development

Continuous member development is key to delivering high quality, cost effective services to the Stroud district. All members have a responsibility to learn new skills in line with the ongoing changes in local government.

Development opportunities will be made available throughout the term based on the following categories:

- **Committee specific** training to support the delivery of committee work programmes.
- **ICT skills** training to support members with the launch of new ICT initiatives or ways of working e.g., Modern.gov and Microsoft Teams.
- **New Legislation/Policy** training to brief members on new or updated legislation and relevant changes to service delivery.
- **Emerging priorities** training to support members in their role such as climate change, health and wellbeing, working with community groups etc.
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** training to provide members with an increased awareness of equality and diversity issues.
- **Development needs** as identified by individual members (personal development plans).

## 4.5 Personal Development and Self-directed learning

The responsibility for identifying learning and development needs rests with individual Members. Members should consider whether they have an area where they particularly want to strengthen their knowledge, skills and understanding in a way that is not possible through internal provision and should consider seeking out additional opportunities through the LGA and other relevant professional bodies and trainers.

Upon completion of the Induction Programme, members will be offered the opportunity to undertake a Personal Development Plan (PDP) and training needs assessment. If members wish to be supported with their Personal Development Plans, Democratic Services can offer a structured process for regularly assessing their individual learning and development needs. This will be conducted in conjunction with the Group Leader and directly with Independent Councillors.

In assessing the responses to both the PDP and training needs assessment, Democratic Services will identify training opportunities to be included in a continuous development programme for members.

There are other self-directed learning opportunities available including:

- E-learning – the council’s online learning platform hosts a number of learning modules
- LGA Workbooks – The LGA offer a wide range of development resources to councillors ([www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk))
- The Members Hub – The Hub will include an online library where guidance documents covering a wide range of topics will be stored. Members can also add their own guidance documents to this page or make requests for topics to be added.

## 4.6 Member-led

Members can identify learning opportunities they can make available to other members including:

- Sharing of knowledge and good practice
- Buddy/mentoring – experienced members providing support to those new to the role (mentoring is usually provided within political Groups but Democratic Services can assist with matching mentors and mentees outside of political groups or for Independent Councillors upon request)
- Case-work management

Democratic Services will be available to support any member-led training events by promoting the training and providing a suitable meeting space.

## 5. Methods of Delivery

A wide variety of in person and/or virtual formats will be used to deliver training such as:



**Online** – E-Learning modules may be used at times to impart important information, or teach a specific skill.



**Workshop** – the purpose of a workshop is to involve participants in learning. Workshops are sessions where participants/attendees are involved in interactive activities or group tasks.



**Briefing** – the purpose of a briefing is to give information or instructions. Briefings could be presented on Teams or Zoom or in person.



**Training** – the purpose of a training session is to teach somebody a specific skill or type of behaviour. Training sessions are likely to be delivered by Service Managers, technical officers or external providers.

Where appropriate, we will work in partnership with other Local Authorities to deliver joint programmes.



## 6. Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity

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As a public body we are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty, which is defined in the Equality Act as:

“A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The Councils' Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy will underpin how we design and deliver the Member Development Programme but in particular we will;

- Ensure all Councillors have equal access to training and development opportunities i.e. by providing multiple sessions in accessible formats and at various times of the day.
- Offer strongly recommended training on equalities and inclusion to all members on an annual basis. This will provide members with the skills necessary to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duties.
- Provide advice and guidance to members setting out how to interpret and evaluate the Equalities Impact Assessments completed for formal reports.

## 7. Feedback and Evaluation

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Evaluation of learning development activities will seek to assess the impact of the development strategy. Training providers will be asked to set out the learning objectives for each session and members will be asked to complete a feedback form asking whether they believe the learning objectives have been achieved, whether the training delivery method was appropriate for the topic and other relevant feedback.

Regular evaluation of the Member Development offer will be undertaken by Democratic Services in conjunction with the Member Development Working Group.

The following evaluation methods will be used:

1. Training evaluation forms and other feedback received from members
2. Feedback through Democratic Services and the Member Development Working Group
3. Statistics on member participation
4. Annual survey to members

Following its completion, the MDWG will review the effectiveness of the induction programme, make recommendations for any changes to future induction programmes and will also recommend follow up areas for training and development.

## 8. Performance measures

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A structured method to measuring the effectiveness of member development will ensure that our approach and content are fit for purpose and meet members' needs as well as the needs of the wider council and the communities they serve.

Our Key Performance Measures are:

- 1. Ensure all members have consistent and equal access to training and development opportunities that take into account different learning styles.**
  - 100% of members completing mandatory training.
  - 15 members trained in Notice of Possession Proceedings
  - 70% of members attending the 'strongly recommended' training courses.
  - 80% of members expressing overall satisfaction with the development programme.
- 2. Provide support for all members to acquire sufficient knowledge and a full range of skills to fulfil all their duties confidently and effectively.**
  - 80% of members reporting that they feel they have the skills to fulfil all their duties.
  - Engagement in the Personal Development Plan.
- 3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the training programme to ensure continuous improvement.**
  - 80% of members report that on the whole, the objectives of training sessions have been met.
- 4. Obtain South West Council's Charter Status accreditation for Member Development by May 2024.**
  - South West Council's Charter Status accreditation is secured by May 2024.

## 9. Support for prospective councillors

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The council is keen to attract members from all different backgrounds to join the council, including those who are not necessarily part of established political groups. These prospective candidates might require some additional information, and support on what it is like to be a councillor, such as details of the potential time commitments, the benefits of being a councillor and supporting communities, as well as some of the challenges.

The following specific support will be offered to prospective councillors:

- A number of briefing sessions will be held for all potential candidates and their election agents. The sessions will cover the essential processes of the election as well as an overview on the expectations and commitment needed to be a councillor. Current members will be asked to present to potential candidates the work required and the knowledge and skills needed to be a councillor.
  - A candidate pack will give information on the process for standing for election and the required forms to complete, as well as details on what it means to be a councillor and details regarding the member induction programme.
  - Candidates will be encouraged to observe Council and Committee meetings to further their understanding of how the Council operates.
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<b>Document Responsibility</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Document title</b>	<b>Service</b>
Member Development Working Group and Corporate Policy and Governance Manager	Member Development Strategy 2023 - 2027	Corporate Policy and Governance

<b>Policy Review</b>			
<b>Updating frequency</b>	<b>Review date</b>	<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>Service</b>
Every 4 years	2027	Corporate Policy and Governance Manager	Corporate Policy and Governance

<b>Document Review and Approvals</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>
Full Council	(for approval)	Date of review or approval