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## Councillor Development Strategy

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**Learning to  
develop excellence!**

# CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. The purpose: why we need a Councillor Development Strategy
3. Our vision and our aims: developing outstanding councillors
4. The available resources
5. Our priorities
6. Providing value for money
7. How we will implement the Strategy
8. How we will measure success and monitor progress

## 1. Introduction

West Lancashire BC's cross-party Member Development Working Group has committed to and endorsed a Councillor Development Strategy as part of our commitment to developing excellence in our councillors.

In recent times, local government has faced a series of unprecedented challenges and all councils have undergone numerous transformations as they continue to embrace new and emergent technologies.

To enable our councillors to adapt to any new challenges as and when they arise, the council will ensure that we regularly review the learning and development needs of our elected members so that they can continue to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as community leaders.

Councillors are at the very heart of everything that we do as a council, and it is essential that we encourage all councillors to develop their skills and knowledge to their full potential to achieve our aims and strategic objectives to deliver high-quality services for our residents.

The council recognises that councillors play a significant role in improving services and identifying and delivering better value for money. Councillors have responsibility for deciding how the council's budgets are spent, and those decisions have major impacts on many thousands of residents, the companies that are based in the borough and the visitors we want to attract to the area.

Despite this, there is no requirement to hold any formal qualifications to serve as a councillor, and the council recognises that our elected members must be given every opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to play an effective role in local government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and ensure the best possible services for the people of West Lancashire.

Continuous professional development is vital for our councillors as well as for our council officers, and it is essential that we continue to support and develop and, where possible, retain those councillors who have taken advantage of the development opportunities offered.

All our councillors must be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil the important and often complex role of representing the wider community, influencing council policy and working together with council officers to achieve shared goals.

By implementing this Strategy, West Lancashire BC will be working to support its councillors and make sure that they have the learning opportunities they need to perform effectively in their roles and meet all the challenges that the future will bring.

## 2. The purpose: why we need a Councillor Development Strategy

The Strategy is the framework that demonstrates in broad terms, the approach the Council will take to providing learning and development to councillors. It refreshes and reiterates our continuing commitment to councillor development and sets out our key objectives and how we intend to achieve them.

The council has had a Strategy as one of the main principles of the North West Charter for Elected Member Development, which is the foundation on which West Lancashire BC is building to develop our councillors and provide ongoing support.

Having a Strategy helps us to attain the high standard of councillor development opportunities that will be required to achieve the Charter and confirms how we will maintain our commitment to learning to build and develop excellence in our councillors.

It describes how we will work together to develop our councillors so that they will help the council achieve the vision set out in the Council Plan.

Fundamental to the Strategy is that our councillors take a leading role, through the Member Development Working Group (see below), to ensure its implementation.

The principal training and development objectives will be to

- improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of elected members to enable them to undertake their community role efficiently and effectively.
- meet the Council's statutory obligations and understand the implications of new legislation and codes of practice that impact on their role.
- embrace the benefits of and acquire the skills necessary to make full use of emerging technologies in meeting the Council's objectives.

## 3. Our vision and our aim: learning to develop excellence in our councillors

This Strategy provides the framework for a training and development programme that will be innovative as well as identifying and incorporating best practice from other sources.

**Our vision** is to develop excellence in our councillors by providing the opportunities for them to improve themselves so that they can perform to their highest possible standard and encouraging them to take advantage of the learning and development opportunities offered.

**Our aim** is to find and utilise the finest examples of training and development opportunities for councillors nationally and internationally and to show that we have the ambition to build excellence into our development programme and training opportunities. This will ensure that all our elected members have the means to develop themselves, which will result in knowledgeable and skilled councillors who are fully motivated and confident enough to carry out their roles effectively.

## 4. The available resources

### **Councillor Development Officer (CDO)**

The council recognises that councillor development is vital to the council's success and has allocated an officer from the Democratic Services Team as CDO to coordinate councillor development.

### **Member Development Working Group (MDWG)**

The council has established the MDWG as a cross party forum to ensure that the ongoing development is councillor-led with professional advice being provided by the CDO.

### **New Councillor Induction**

The council has developed an induction process for newly elected councillors to ensure that they receive sufficient basic training following their election to enable them to contribute and participate as a councillor as quickly as possible. Each time an election is held, we review the induction materials and make any necessary improvements to the new councillors' induction process.

### **Councillor Development Programme\* ("the Programme")**

The Programme reflects the values and principles set out in the Council Plan and includes specific learning objectives within three logical "stages" of development: Basic, Competent and Accomplished. We will provide all councillors, within the constraints of the available budget, with all the necessary resources to provide them with the appropriate learning and development opportunities. This will enable elected members to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to progress through the three stages and deliver the high quality and best value services to residents that the council needs.

The Programme is designed to be sufficiently flexible to cover any already identified requirements and to respond on an ongoing basis to any new issues as and when they arise. This may for example, include an increasing focus on climate change issues to ensure that the council is taking positive action to address the climate emergency.

**Councillor Skills Framework** (the Framework) - the council has developed a Framework (included as the Appendix of the Programme), setting out all the different roles and responsibilities of councillors and for specific councillor positions. The MDWG and CDO will review the Framework as appropriate to ensure that it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

We will deliver a range of development activities and provide sufficient training to give all councillors the opportunity to build their skills and knowledge to a level that is in keeping with the varied roles and responsibilities set out in the Framework. This includes the practical skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively as a ward councillor as well as those for any additional specific roles to which councillors are appointed.

The council will provide councillors with development support in their broader role as community representatives as well as specific training opportunities designed to help them to fulfil their scrutiny, regulatory and other committee roles.

We will also provide support and development opportunities for councillors in leadership roles, including Chairmen and Group Leader roles as appropriate.

**21st Century Councillor** - the Programme has taken into account many of the findings of the 21st Century Councillor joint report by North West Employers and the University of Birmingham, which challenged councils to rethink the role of Elected Members. The 21st Century Councillor report covered the range of roles that councillors are expected to perform and the competencies, skills, support and training requirements to undertake those roles.



### **Personal responsibility**

The council expects councillors to take personal responsibility to ensure their own continuous professional personal development and to develop their knowledge and skills as a councillor throughout their term of office.

Members have a responsibility to attend the training and development opportunities organised for them and councillor development should not be considered as the exclusive obligation of the Council. It is principally the responsibility of the elected Members themselves.

The council is not required to maintain a development record relating to any other forms of training that councillors may undertake outside the Council, however these can be included in individual records on request.

### **Councillor Development Network**

North West Employers hold meetings of the Councillor Development Network (usually virtually) every 3-4 months to

- provide updates on legislation and how we can keep councillors informed,
- share ideas, best practice and case studies of what other authorities are doing,
- circulate and disseminate resources.

The CDO regularly attends the Network meetings and any interested West Lancashire councillors are also welcome to attend. It is not necessary to be a member of the MDWG to

do so. The meeting dates, times and joining instructions of upcoming meetings will be notified to councillors by email.

## 5. Our priorities

### Equality of opportunity

We are committed to providing equal opportunities and promoting diversity and will ensure that no-one is unfairly disadvantaged and that there is access to learning and development opportunities for all our councillors, irrespective of

- political affiliation or independence,
- number of years of service as a councillor,
- seniority, age,
- disability,
- sex or sexual orientation, gender or gender reassignment,
- marital or partnership status,
- pregnancy and maternity,
- race, colour, ethnic or national origins,
- nationality (including citizenship),
- religion or philosophical belief, including lack of religion or belief.

We will provide any councillors with specific needs (for example, a physical disability) with all appropriate support and facilities that will enable them to participate in the learning programme. A Carer's and Dependent Person's Allowance may also be claimed in accordance with our approved scheme for attendance at learning and development events.

### Newly elected councillors

Induction training is provided for Elected Members new to the Council to ensure they have the necessary information and awareness of the organisation's internal and external relationships. We will provide all newly elected councillors with a full programme of induction training, including a mandatory briefing on the council's Code of Conduct.

### Councillors on regulatory / quasi-judicial committees

If adequate training has not been provided/received before conducting hearings and inquiries and/or making decisions of a regulatory or quasi-judicial nature, any decisions taken could be subject to a legal challenge. It is essential therefore that the councillors who are members of those bodies are fully briefed and have received all the necessary training.

We will provide specific training for members of the council's regulatory/ bodies: Planning Committee, Licensing Committees, Audit & Governance Committee and Standards Committee (including hearings).

Members appointed to any of the regulatory bodies listed above must attend the appropriate briefings and learning sessions provided or otherwise demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge or they will not be allowed to participate in any *hearing, inquiry or decision that will affect the rights of an individual*.

### Mentors

Where possible, political groups should ensure that mentoring from experienced councillors is available to newer councillors within their groups. The council also encourages more experienced councillors to share their expertise with those taking up new roles and responsibilities irrespective of whether they share the same political affiliation. Councillors are

encouraged to take advantage of any mentoring opportunities offered both inside and outside the council.

### **Encouraging our residents to consider becoming councillors**

We will regularly promote the process of becoming a councillor and publicise what being a councillor involves via the council's website so that any eligible West Lancashire resident who might wish to stand for election is aware of the process and the commitment. We will also provide briefing sessions for candidates in the run up to local elections and will inform all candidates of the event well in advance to ensure that any independent candidates have the same opportunity to attend any such sessions as the candidates from political parties.

### **Value for money**

West Lancashire BC is committed to continuous improvement and innovation and best value and recognises the need for a value for money approach to councillor development and to encourage both councillors and council employees to develop themselves to their full potential.

Wherever possible, councillor training sessions will be facilitated by our own council officers who can often provide specific in-house expertise, and by cost sharing with neighbouring authorities.

For some essential learning sessions, when such in-house expertise is not available, we will endeavour to procure the best possible external providers from a variety of sources, within the available budget.

We will endeavour to source the most suitable and best value facilitators for learning sessions and briefings and will maintain a list of suitable training providers and procure any appropriate learning materials, where appropriate. These may include the following external bodies amongst others:

- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Local Government Information Unit (LGiU)
- Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
- Centre for Governance & Scrutiny
- North West Employers
- Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA),
- Institute of Licensing (IoL)
- Counter Terrorism Policing North West (CTPNW)
- Lancashire County Council (LCC).

Attendance at the briefings and courses that we provide will not necessarily suit everyone all the time. The council recognises that individuals learn in many different ways and that some councillors' development needs may be better served through other learning methods such as books, open learning, multimedia and digital learning resources including e-learning, webinars (both live and on-demand/recorded), video and audio.



## **6. How we will implement the Strategy**

We expect each individual councillor to take personal responsibility for their own learning and self-development and attendance at the majority of learning and development events will be voluntary. Exceptions to this will include training on the Code of Conduct, GDPR (data protection), Risk, Safeguarding, and for those councillors sitting on the regulatory bodies of the council.

### **Member Development Working Group**

The MDWG represent the views of members in all aspects of development for councillors and will meet at least twice a year to monitor and evaluate the implementation, overall quality and take-up of councillor development activities.

The MDWG will be involved in the preparation and approval of councillor development strategies and programmes and will support and encourage councillors in the identification of their development needs and the take up of learning opportunities.

The MDWG will monitor progress in relation to councillor development and a report, outlining all training and development sessions offered and undertaken by councillors will be considered by the Working Group. Part of the role of the MDWG will be to assess the beneficial impacts that the training has had on both councillors and the council as a whole.

### **Councillor Development Plan (CDP)**

Councillors have differing training needs and we will undertake an initial review in the months following the election to assess the training and development requirements of the new intake of councillors and any others who have not completed the process. The identification of their needs will take place in an atmosphere of confidentiality and will initiate an extensive programme of training and development for all elected members.

We will identify all councillors' individual development requirements through the completion of a CDP questionnaire and will provide regular opportunities to reassess development needs throughout the term of office. We expect all elected members to review their individual CDP regularly to promote a lifelong learning culture throughout the council. All councillors are then able to inform us of any areas in which they would like to improve their skills and knowledge when they arise.

We will identify the overall training and development priorities for members by collating the CDP questionnaire responses and this will form the basis of an ongoing schedule of training events.

### **Providing learning and development opportunities**

We will provide all necessary development opportunities in line with the priorities identified by the CDP questionnaires and within the resources available.

Councillors will need to be proficient in the use of ICT systems so that they can access all necessary information, participate effectively in paperless meetings, webinars and training sessions and are able to communicate effectively using electronic media in line with emergent technology including social media, videoconferencing, virtual meetings, etc. Training in the use of ICT and new technology will be provided as and when necessary.

All applications to participate in training will be treated in accordance with the Protocol for Members attending Conferences/Courses

### **Informing councillors of development opportunities**

Information on courses, etc. will be sent chiefly via email. Training and development requirements will be met in a number of ways and in collaboration with a range of partners. We will provide regular in-house training events facilitated by the Council's officers or bought in, as well as opportunities to attend external events, including virtual and e-Learning courses where appropriate and affordable, distance and on-demand learning, and self-study.

### **Working in partnership with neighbouring and other local authorities**

Where possible, we will work in partnership with neighbouring and other local authorities, e.g. Lancashire County Council (LCC), as well as with other relevant organisations to share best practice and to share the cost of councillor development. Where appropriate we may offer places on our own in-house courses to councillors from other authorities. This may involve a charge to the other authorities or might be provided on a reciprocal basis if appropriate.

The CDO and MDWG will provide advice and information to councillors about learning and development opportunities by regular emails and invitations to sessions and where relevant, inclusion on the calendar of meetings on the intranet.

### **Financial resources - Covering the costs of training**

The council needs to cover the training requirements of all our councillors and in conjunction with the CDO, the Democratic Services Manager will manage the allocation of the available funds to ensure that the budget is spent effectively. Councillor training and development activities must be delivered within resources and must provide value for money.

The Council will determine its priorities in relation to training and development needs. It is likely that, given its finite financial resources and the need to ensure that service delivery continues to be provided, it will need to determine priorities each year in relation to training and development needs.

Where necessary, the Democratic Services Manager will consult with and gain the approval of the Leader and/or relevant officers before approving any individual councillor's request for training and, if any additional resources are required, a business case would have to be made and taken forward through appropriate channels.

If conflicting demands involving the prioritisation and allocation of the training budget arise, the MDWG and/or Democratic Services Manager may provide advice, however the Leader in consultation with the Chief Legal & Democratic Services Officer (**Monitoring Officer**) with responsibility for the councillor development budget, will be ultimately responsible for any final decision.

### **Political Groups**

The political groups are asked to

- nominate a representative to promote councillor development,
- promote the discussion of councillor development matters at group meetings,
- encourage members to attend training sessions.

The group representative should also be a member of the MDWG to act as a bridge between the Working Group and the Political Groups

### **Democratic Services Team**

The Democratic Services team will support councillors' learning and development by:

- delivering a programme of induction training for new councillors,
- identifying and assessing members' needs via CDP questionnaires,
- providing a comprehensive learning and development programme for councillors, based on essential requirements and needs identified,
- ensuring that all councillors are made aware of learning and development opportunities and co-ordinating development opportunities for councillors,
- maintaining a record of all councillors' attendance at learning events and training approved by the Leader in accordance with the Protocol for Members Attending Conferences/Courses.

## **7. How we will measure success and monitor progress**

We are committed to ensuring that the learning and development opportunities provided are meeting the needs of councillors and achieving value for money.

Initial indicators of success will be

- the ability of our councillors to perform effectively in their roles,
- the completion of CDP questionnaires by the majority of our councillors to identify key development needs.

The MDWG will be involved in ensuring the delivery of the Strategy and Programme, the review of their effectiveness and the ongoing determination of priorities.

### **Evaluation**

As far as practicable all councillor development activities will be evaluated to determine their suitability and effectiveness.

As appropriate, the MDWG will consider feedback on courses that councillors have attended, monitor participation levels and evaluate the impact and the cost of learning events and the likely funds available.

In the short term, we will measure progress by

- councillors' engagement and continued participation in development activities,
- satisfactory levels of councillor attendance at the learning events provided,
- councillor feedback indicating that the development events provided are suitable,
- training evaluation responses that substantiate that sessions are useful and rewarding.

In the medium term, after we have identified our councillors' needs, improvements in councillors' skills and knowledge should become evident when councillors undertake to review their CDP questionnaires.

The wider long-term aim of this Strategy is to see improvements in services and value for money for the residents of West Lancashire. We are confident that increased knowledge and

skills will support our aim to develop outstanding councillors, which will in turn produce better services for residents.

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