



Barrow Borough Council

Member Development Strategy 2021/2023

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Introduction

Local Government has undergone a massive period of change. Councillors need to take on a broad range of new skills, networks and knowledge; often in a short space of time to embrace increasingly complex roles. Some of these skills are inherent in a politician, some may need to be learned, and others just developed. Adding this new range of skills to existing competence will not be possible without a structured approach and a serious commitment made to Member development with the active inclusion of Members.

In November 2003, the Council declared its commitment to achieve the North West Charter for Elected Member Development which involved exploring new roles for Members, considered how to identify and address the development needs of Members and introduced a practical methodology for assessing key service priorities for the Council. This was achieved in 2006, since then the Council has had successful Level 1 reviews in 2009, 2012 and 2017. This achievement would not have been possible without the Council's commitment and the commitment of its Elected Members to training and development.

A further review would have been due to take place during 2020 but this had been delayed due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Vision

The Member Development Strategy provides a long-term direction for Member training and development. The vision behind the strategy is;

“To ensure that all Members have access to adequate training and development opportunities to enable them to fulfill their responsibilities”

Objectives

The Member Development Strategy has the following underlying aims:

- ❖ To encourage involvement of Members in their own development and learning – where they identify their own particular development needs and the means of satisfying those needs to meet the Corporate Strategy of the Council;
- ❖ To focus on Members being learners rather than recipients of training;
- ❖ To ensure that all newly Elected Members are properly inducted into the Council and their role;
- ❖ To see the use of Information Technology as the norm and to ensure that all Members have the opportunity to benefit from Information Technology to assist them in their role and their development; and
- ❖ To enable the sharing of good practice.

Who is Involved

The responsibility for the delivery of the Member Development Strategy involves a range of people, led by the Democratic Services Manager, Democratic Services Officers and the Member Training Working Group. A Learning Programme will be agreed on a biennial basis by the Member Training Working Group based on recommendations from the Democratic Services Officer (Member Support) based on the most commonly identified development needs derived from Skills Audits undertaken with Members, and any other identified corporate training needs.

Planning & Timing of Member Development

To ensure effective planning and co-ordination of Member Development, it is imperative that the people involved in the cycle of identifying needs through to delivering and evaluating training keep each other informed.

To ensure that all Members can participate in Member Development, the Council will endeavour to arrange training events around Committee meetings and ensure that wherever possible, all events organised are accessible in terms of location. Some events may be held virtually via Zoom.

Learning Styles

It is recognised that people have different preferences for the way in which they learn new skills. There are a wide range of methods for learning including:

- ❑ E-Learning;
- ❑ Networking;
- ❑ Observation;
- ❑ Presentations;
- ❑ Quiet Reading;
- ❑ Internet Research;
- ❑ Councillor Mentoring;
- ❑ Visits to other Local Authorities;
- ❑ Local, Regional and National Conferences; and
- ❑ Corporate Training and Development Courses.

Member Induction

As part of the Council's Induction Programme, Members are invited to attend a half-day briefing at the Town Hall hosted by the Democratic Services Manager, and the Council's Management Team.

The induction day briefly comprises of:-

- ❑ An introduction to the political management structure, Member/Officer Protocol, role of Councillors and explanation of the Constitution;

- ❑ The Ethical Framework: the Council's Code of Conduct, Registering and declaring interests;
- ❑ Members allowances, claiming expenses, car mileage and tax returns;
- ❑ Introduction to Democratic Services section and their role;
- ❑ Cumbria County Council Functions;
- ❑ Member Training and Development including Skills Audits; and
- ❑ Tour of the Town Hall.

The previous all out elections in 2019 saw the introduction of a comprehensive Member Induction Training Programme comprising of a variety of sessions throughout May – July as follows:-

- ❑ Opportunity to meet Management Team over a cup of tea/coffee;
- ❑ Licensing/Licensing Regulatory Committee Induction;
- ❑ Code of Conduct explained in more detail;
- ❑ Planning Committee Induction;
- ❑ iPad Issue Session;
- ❑ Planning – What a Ward Councillor needs to know;
- ❑ Understanding Data Protection and Freedom of Information;
- ❑ Audit Committee Training;
- ❑ Background to Local Government Finance;
- ❑ What a Ward Councillor needs to know about Housing;
- ❑ Meeting Procedures;
- ❑ Introduction to Community Services; and
- ❑ Introduction to Regeneration and Built Environment.

Following the By-Elections in May 2021, the two new Members received an Induction by the Democratic Services Manager and Monitoring Officer. They had also been invited to attend training for Planning Committee and Licensing Committee.

Member Training Working Group

The Council has a Member Training Working Group who have the responsibility of meeting on a quarterly basis to review and monitor performance progress of Member Development.

The Member Training Working Group is a cross-party group currently consisting of the following Members and Officers;

- ❑ Derek Brook – Labour (Chairman)
- ❑ Shaun Blezard - Labour
- ❑ Beverly Morgan - Labour
- ❑ Sam Ronson – Conservative
- ❑ Martin McLeavy – Conservative (Co-opted)
- ❑ Paula Westwood – Democratic Services Officer (Member Support)
- ❑ Jon Huck – Democratic Services Manager

Skills Audits

It is believed that people are more effective in learning if they take some time to think about what they need to learn before launching straight into it. Skills Audits are an ideal opportunity to do this thinking.

That is why, following Induction, all newly Elected Members are encouraged to complete a Skills Audit. The information from this can be used for self-assessment purposes and can also be helpful to the Council in terms of providing common training for groups of Members where similar learning and development needs are identified.

As the Council conducts 'all-out' elections every four years, as opposed to a third of the Council being elected every year, Skills Audits are now undertaken every two years, rather than on an annual basis.

The findings from the Skills Audits and any other relevant training considerations are then presented to the Member Training Working Group who agree and formulate the Learning Programme based on the most commonly identified development needs.

Skills Audits are important to ensure that training events are Member-led.

Information Services

An abundance of useful information is made available for Members to assist them in their role. Information can be obtained from the Members' Room or from Democratic Services.

IT Accessibility

Today more and more information is transmitted and stored electronically than ever before; Members without IT skills may find themselves at a significant disadvantage. Members are strongly encouraged to use IT and take up opportunities for developing their IT skills.

Paperless Committee System

All new Members are issued with an iPad or laptop to allow secure access and management of their Council e-mail account; to provide access to Committee Agendas electronically and generally assist in the conduct of their Councillor duties.

The Council publishes Agendas and Minutes to Members via a Committee Management System; Modern.Gov.

Use of this technology allows Members to access information on the move, take advantage of secure Wi-Fi access in the main Council buildings and contributes to the reduction in paper and printing costs outlined in the Council's digital strategy plans.

Evaluation & Monitoring of the Strategy

It is vital that Members are well equipped to undertake their work and be effective as local representatives.

The Member Development Strategy will be reviewed on a biennial basis in conjunction with the Democratic Services Manager, the Democratic Services Officer (Member Support) and the Member Training Working Group. The responsibility for agreeing the overall strategy sits with Full Council.

The Democratic Services Manager, Democratic Services Officer (Member Support) and the Member Training Working Group have the joint responsibility for the development of the Learning Programme and for monitoring outcomes and improved effectiveness of the Members.

Evaluation & Monitoring of What Members Learn

In order to get the best out of training and development opportunities it is important to evaluate the impact of any organised training event and ensure that any learning has been put into practice.

After attending any training event or conference, Members will be requested to complete a feedback form. If we don't do this, we may be wasting our time and money. These forms should be completed as honestly as possible to help ensure that future Members are receiving high quality training with positive outcomes. The Member Training Working Group reviews the attendance and feedback from events on a quarterly basis.

Continuous Improvement

In September 2006, the Council were awarded with the North West Charter Award for Elected Member Development, which has a lifespan of three years. The Council is required to be re-assessed every three years to ensure continuous improvement and improved effectiveness of the Member development process. The Council had a successful Level 1 review in 2009, 2012 and again in 2017. A further review would have been due to take place during 2020 but this had been delayed due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Member Training Budget

Each year a budget of £5,000 is allocated for Member training and development. However, this is a demand led budget and supplementary funding can be made available if required. In 2019/2020 the expenditure was £7,431.21 and in 2020/2021 the expenditure was £1,010.91.

Progress on Member Training & Development in 2019/2021

Between May 2019 and April 2021 various training and development opportunities had been made available to Members. The events included:-

- ❑ Member Induction;
- ❑ Licensing Committee Induction;
- ❑ Code of Conduct;
- ❑ Planning Committee Induction;
- ❑ Planning – What a Ward Councillor needs to know;
- ❑ Understanding Data Protection and Freedom of Information;
- ❑ Audit Committee Training;
- ❑ Background to Local Government Finance;
- ❑ What a Ward Councillor needs to know about Housing;
- ❑ Overview & Scrutiny Training – Scrutiny Essentials;
- ❑ Overview & Scrutiny Training – Effective Questioning;

- ❑ Meeting Procedures;
- ❑ Introduction to Community Services;
- ❑ Homelessness, Universal Credits and Choice Based Lettings;
- ❑ Corporate Parenting Training;
- ❑ Licensing Peer-to-Peer Session;
- ❑ Anti-Social Behaviour (Housing);
- ❑ Stock Condition Survey (Housing);
- ❑ Planning Training – The Role of Councillors in Planning;
- ❑ Council Plan Workshop;
- ❑ LGA Member Session – Hitting the Ground Running;
- ❑ Strength Based Leadership for the 21st Century Councillor;
- ❑ Safe and Confident Use of Social Media for Councillors;
- ❑ Suicide Awareness Session;
- ❑ LGA Session 1 – Understanding Diversity and Inclusion;
- ❑ Code of Conduct Training;
- ❑ LGA Session 2 – The Far Right Landscape in 2021;
- ❑ Values & Behaviours Session
- ❑ Safeguarding Training

In addition to the above mentioned training, during the Coronavirus Pandemic, Council business had been switched to remote working, with meetings and briefings being provided online to keep Members up to date with issues. Between May 2020 and April 2021, the following briefings had taken place for Members:-

- ❑ Community Resilience Hubs – 10th June 2020 (CCC Briefing);
- ❑ Town Deal and Future High Street Fund – 22nd June, 2020;
- ❑ Town Deal and Future High Street Fund – 15th July, 2020;
- ❑ Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure – 10th November, 2020;
- ❑ Future of Piel Island- 26th November, 2020;
- ❑ Asset Awareness Session – 11th December, 2020;
- ❑ Community Wellbeing Hubs – 14th December, 2020 (CCC Briefing);
- ❑ Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure – 14th January, 2021;
- ❑ Safer Streets Scheme – 18th January, 2021;
- ❑ Cumbria CVS – Roadmap to Sustainability – 25th January, 2021;
- ❑ Coastal Strategy – 1st February, 2021 (CCC Briefing);
- ❑ Freeport – 2nd February, 2021;
- ❑ Barrow’s New Constellation – 4th March, 2021;
- ❑ Customer Services Strategy– 11th March, 2021;
- ❑ Town Deal Housing Market Renewal Proposals – 16th March, 2021;
- ❑ Earnse Bay Hub – 24th March, 2021 (CCC Briefing);
- ❑ Safer Streets Scheme – 25th March, 2021;
- ❑ Age UK Digital Inclusion – 31st March, 2021;
- ❑ Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Update – 23rd April, 2021; and
- ❑ Levelling Up and Community Renewal Funding – 26th April, 2021.

The variety of briefings provided to Members demonstrates communication and involvement in decision making.

The Council Plan

The Council Plan sets out the Council's vision and priorities for future plans. It covers the period from 2020-2024 and is intended to guide the Borough Council's decision making and how we spend our budgets.

The Council's Vision is for the Borough to be a great place to live, work and visit.

Councillors and Officers have developed the Council Plan through a series of workshops to agree the Council's priorities. The Council recognised that it cannot deliver its objectives alone and that partnership and alliance building would form a key input to the proposals with assistance being sought from other organisations including County Council, Local Enterprise Partnership or the Health Sector.

The key priorities for the Council for 2020-2024 are as follows:-

- ❑ Priority 1: People – Enabling residents to live happy, healthy, productive lives;
- ❑ Priority 2: Place – Creating a vibrant, safe and welcoming place where people want to live; and
- ❑ Priority 3: Prosperity – Supporting our economy to thrive and benefit all our residents.

Local Government Reorganisation

It has been recognised that the training requirements for Members over the next 12-18 months will be largely influenced by Local Government Reorganisation. Training on matters such as Public Sector Reform, Devolution, Transformation and Responding to Change have all been identified as areas for development and will be included in the 2021/2023 Member Learning Programme.

Further Information

If you would like any further information on Member training and development, or would like to arrange for training on a specific issue, please contact Paula Westwood, Democratic Services Officer (Member Support) on: 876322 or e-mail: pwestwood@barrowbc.gov.uk