

Cheshire East Council

# Member Development Strategy 2009 - 2010



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Foreword by the Leader of the Council,  
Councillor Wesley Fitzgerald

***“To Aspire to work and learn together  
in order to succeed”***

Cheshire East Council recognises the fundamentally important role of elected Members in establishing and maintaining the strategic direction of the Council, in order to meet the values and achieve the outcomes of its Corporate Plan. Members have a pivotal role in bringing about improvements to the quality of life of people living in the Borough. Success will be dependant upon our capacity to help provide the best possible services for our residents, workers, businesses and visitors. Central to this is our commitment to provide learning opportunities, to enable Members to develop the skills they need to carry out their roles and responsibilities and to perform fully within the Council, their neighbourhood and ward and with partners.

Effective Member Development is essential to ensure that Councillors update their knowledge and learn new skills and behaviours. This Council is committed to supporting its elected Members in their complex roles, by ensuring that appropriate learning and development opportunities are identified, realised and accessible. Only by having Members who can exploit development opportunities can we successfully implement new ways of working and continuously improve our performance.

This Strategy has been produced to enable the Council to realise the full potential of its Members in an appropriate manner and is tailored to the Council's needs. Its key aims and objectives are to:

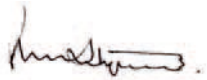
- Establish a culture whereby continuous elected Member Development is seen as a key component to the success of the organisation.
- Identify individual and common learning needs; ensuring that the Member Development Programme consistently addresses these needs and the Council's strategic themes.
- Provide Members with the opportunity to access events and activities that are appropriate to their roles and responsibilities recognising the importance of their role within the Council, their constituencies and with partner organisations.
- Enable Members to be fully conversant with the Council's key strategic themes, in order that their activities as a Councillor are consistent with Council priorities.
- Ensure that the ongoing requirements of the North West Charter on Elected Member Development are met.

I have pleasure in commending this Strategy to you and I urge everyone to whom it applies to promote the approach it advocates and to focus on the ultimate aims of learning and development. The personal benefits for Members who invest their time and effort in their own development planning include:

- Developing skills that are transferable to the community.
- Ability to exert influence where it matters.
- Greater capacity to deliver change and improvement.
- Keeping up-to-date with the changing face of local government.
- Increased confidence and ability to fulfil personal ambitions for the benefit of the local community and oneself.
- Potential to develop in the field of public service leadership is improved.

In order to provide sufficient flexibility, the strategy provides a wide range of learning options and opportunities, intended to make learning accessible to each individual and to accommodate a variety of learning styles.

It is imperative that Members fully support Member Development and are committed to its application in an effective, economic and efficient manner.



Wesley Fitzgerald  
Leader of Cheshire East Council





# Introduction

Strong and effective leadership is the key to efficient, accountable and responsible local government. Our Councillors are representatives, Champions and Leaders of their local communities. They make decisions, deliver change, challenge and scrutinise proposed actions, communicate the Council's plans and take up issues raised with them by their constituents. With the publication of the 'Communities in Control' white paper, all of Cheshire East's eighty one Members must be able to fully take on the role of Community Leader, empowering local people to influence service delivery.

The importance of developing the capacity of Members to lead, support and progress the Council's aims and objectives is recognised and valued by Cheshire East Council, which is committed to a policy of Member Training and Development, in line with the principles contained in the North West Charter on Elected Member Development.

## The Aims of the Strategy

The aim of the Strategy, which was drawn up by the Member Development Panel, is to provide a framework for Member Training and Development over the current Municipal Year. In its simplest form it is designed to:

- Set out a means of meeting the needs of individual Members and the Council as a whole
- Raise awareness amongst Members of their own responsibilities
- Help Members to gain the skills and knowledge they require

The document promotes training and development opportunities for Members by identifying the support which will be offered by the authority and the level of commitment expected in return from its Members. It sets out the Council's short and long term strategic aims and priorities for Member Development, which reflects the corporate vision and provides a structure for delivering a programme of learning and development.

In order to provide sufficient flexibility, the Strategy provides a wide range of learning options and opportunities, intended to make learning accessible to each individual and to accommodate a variety of learning styles.

The effectiveness of the Strategy is dependent on a commitment from all Members to allocate time each year to take an active part in the events that have been organised on their behalf and reviewing their learning and development needs.

The Strategy should be read in conjunction with the authority's Corporate Plan and Constitution, both of which are available by clicking on the 'Your Council' link on the website [www.cheshireeast.gov.uk](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk)

# Corporate Training

## Induction

The Council will provide an extensive induction programme for newly Elected and re-Elected Members, made up of a combination of training sessions, written guidance and a tour of the borough. It will start immediately after the Council elections, which are held every four years and will cover a number of essential topics, to enable Members to undertake their responsibilities quickly and effectively. Where relevant, serving Members will be invited to participate in the process; to share their experiences of life as a Councillor.

The process of induction will take a full year to complete and will include training relevant to the Members' particular role. For those Members elected following a by-election, a more tailored approach will be taken, which will cover the same essential topics.

Induction will provide Members with a sound foundation of knowledge on:

- the Council's powers and duties
- the delivery of Council services
- Members' Code of Conduct
- Local Government Finance
- the Inspection Regime
- the Council's organisational structure and principle service areas
- Member Development Programme.

To engage Members in the process from the point they join the authority, each Councillor is provided with a Development Handbook, which contains information relating to the following:

- Declaration of Commitment to the North West Charter on Elected Member Development
- The Member Development Strategy
- Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan
- Member Development Programme
- Personal Development
- Contact details for the Member Development Panel and key Democratic Services and Executive Office Support staff

**Council Commitment:** *To provide a comprehensive support and induction programme for all newly Elected Members.*

**Member Commitment:** *All Newly Elected Members will be expected to attend the sessions offered.*



## Core Skills

A significant part of a Member's time is spent dealing with matters raised by constituents. Whilst some matters may require officer support to resolve, others require the Member to act as an advocate for the constituent; monitoring or tracking any delays in resolution. This may involve significant organisational, mediation and negotiation skills and an ability to prioritise casework. The Council recognises that these important skills must be addressed, whether through training, mentoring, shadowing or by other means and will ensure that all new Members receive, as part of their induction, training in these areas, if required.

**Council Commitment:** *To provide on-going core skills training for Members on the basis of individual need and to reflect emerging themes i.e.*

*Charing Meetings, Media Awareness, Public Speaking, Presentation Skills, Dealing with Casework Information Technology, Mediation, Negotiation Skills*

**Member Commitment:** *All Members will be expected to attend the sessions offered.*



## Committee Training

Training on Committee roles and responsibilities will be made available to all Members and substitute Members appointed to the authority's Committees. In respect of quasi-judicial bodies, such as Licensing and Planning Committees, Members will only be able to participate in a meeting if they have attended a relevant training course. Training sessions will be organised by Lead Officer(s) for the regulatory function in consultation with the Senior Member Development Officer.

**Council Commitment:** *To:*

- i) arrange training for Members appointed to sit on a Committee, in line with allocated duties; and*
- ii) Provide on-going training for each Committee as appropriate.*

**Member Commitment:** *To attend the training offered to provide flexibility.*

## Member Development Programme

The Member Development Programme is linked to the Council's Corporate objectives and is intended to reflect:-

- i) The needs of Members arising from Personal Development/ One to One interviews; and
- ii) The strategic themes set out in the Corporate Plan.

Each year, the document will be developed in consultation with the Member Development Panel, based on needs identified from Members' Personal Development Plans, the requirements of new legislation and emerging corporate themes. It will be a living document, which will provide an overview of the training to be planned and delivered during the Municipal Year. It will have clear objectives and links to the aims of the Council, the roles and functions of Members and any changes affecting the Council's priorities.

Where appropriate, the input of Members into the content of sessions will be sought, via the use of pre-event questionnaires, to guide the content and ensure that the event matches the expectations of the target audience. The Council will work with its partners to arrange sessions of common relevance in the pursuit of cost effectiveness.

**Council Commitment:** *To provide a comprehensive, topical and varied programme each year, reflecting the needs of Members and the authority.*

**Member Commitment:** *Members will be expected to attend relevant sessions during the year, attendance to be recorded.*

## Seminars and Conferences

The Member Development Panel recognises that benefit can be achieved for both the Council and individual Member from attending seminars or conferences, provided that learning is shared within the authority.

Requests to attend conferences or seminars are first discussed with the Member's Group Leader, support for which is given based on business-need, taking into account the Member's Council responsibilities and the availability of funds.

**Council Commitment:** *To support the acquisition of new knowledge via attendance at conferences/seminars.*

**Member Commitment:** *To share with others the knowledge gained from attendance at conferences/seminars via an agreed feedback process following the event.*





# Personal Training

## Personal Development Plans

Personal development planning is, at its most basic, a means of helping Members to update their knowledge and learn new skills so that they can be more effective and take forward the Council's aims and objectives ensuring its priorities are met. Personal development planning enables Members to set their own goals and provides them with tangible evidence of their achievements.

Each Member is invited to participate in a Personal Development/One to One interview every two years, so that they can discuss, in a confidential setting, their development needs for the forthcoming year and identify how those needs should be met. Whilst the outcome of the discussion is pertinent to the individual concerned, the themes which emerge are shared with the Member Development Panel, which assists it to develop the following year's programme, allowing resources to be targeted fairly and efficiently.

Review meetings are held in the intervening years, with the process being used by Members to evaluate their individual performance, identify any current or future training needs and their preferred training styles. The information they choose to share with the Council will be used to identify any gaps in the broader Member Development Programme.

### **Council Commitment:** *To*

- i) Arrange a Personal Development/One to One interview for all Members every two years;*
- ii) Offer an opportunity, one year on from the primary interview, to review progress and identify any arising development needs; and*
- iii) Use the information gathered from Personal Development/One to One Interviews to inform the Member Development Programme for the forthcoming year.*

**Member Commitment:** *To attend any Personal Development/One to One interviews Review meetings arranged for them.*

## Individual Developmental Needs

Where a number of Members identify the same development need (e.g. Time Management) a suitable course will be arranged. Where the need is more individual in nature, a bespoke approach will be sought; subject to the cost of making the provision being reasonable.

**Council Commitment:** *To seek out appropriate opportunities to meet the individual needs of Members (as far as practicable), taking into account the nature of the need.*

**Member Commitment:** *To attend all sessions/events arranged for their individual benefit.*



## Information Technology

IT equipment will be provided to each Member following their election, who will receive appropriate support with regard to its operation, to include both technical and 'how to' support. Assistance is also available 'out of hours' via a dedicated telephone number.

As the Council favours electronic communication, it is to each Member's advantage to achieve a basic level of skill in this area. Working in partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Council, all Members will be invited to complete a Training Needs Analysis, with priority being given to supporting Members who are identified from their responses as having a need to achieve this standard.

As the Council moves towards the harmonisation of its IT hardware, IT Clinics will be offered to the more experienced Members, to discuss non urgent problems.

**Council Commitment:** *To supply Members with the necessary IT equipment for their role and provide adequate support.*

**Member Commitment:** *For each Member to commit to attaining an operational level of IT skills, in order to allow them to carry out their role as Councillor.*



## Leadership Academy

The IDeA Leadership Academy supports Members who wish to explore their individual role and build on their existing skills. Funding will be made available for a limited number of Members to participate in the IDeA leadership modules, priority for 2009/2010 being given to Cabinet Members/Group Leaders.

**Council Commitment:** *To offer the opportunity to Cabinet Members and Group Leaders to attend IDeA Leadership Modules as places/resources allow.*

**Member Commitment:** *To take up any agreed placement and to provide appropriate feedback where this would be useful/beneficial to others.*

## E-Learning

Individuals have different learning styles and there are some who prefer a more hands-on approach to learning, or who find it difficult to attend sessions, due to work/family commitments. E-learning enables Members to access modules at their own convenience and work at their own pace.

All Members have access to the e-learning modules provided as part of the Member Development Gateway, hosted by North West Employer's Organisation. The Training and Development page on the Council's Intranet will provides links to other useful sites, such as Modern Councillor. Further work will be undertaken in this area to extend the number of opportunities Members have to learn on-line.

**Council Commitment:** *To ensure that all Members have access to learning opportunities at a time convenient to them.*

**Member Commitment:** *Where appropriate and where in line with their learning style, to make use of E-learning resources.*



## Mentoring

One-to-one mentoring is a developmental and learning technique, aimed at increasing personal capacity, skills and learning. Funding will be made available for Members to receive mentoring from an accredited peer mentor, subject to the availability of resources and personal need.

For those not allocated an accredited peer mentor, support will be made available to Members who request it from within their own political group, confirmation of which will be provided to the Senior Member Development Officer, for monitoring purposes.

**Council Commitment:** *To arrange appropriate mentoring support for any Member who requests it, funding permitted.*

**Member Commitment:** *For One to One mentoring sessions to be undertaken every two years, conducted by the Member's Group Leader.*

# Monitoring

## Evaluation

To be of benefit, any training has to match the needs of Members and be comparable to the objectives of the organisation and it is important that all courses are analysed in terms of relevance and effectiveness. This must be an honest and constructive assessment, so that any necessary improvements/enhancements can be made to future events. Receiving feedback from those involved is a key factor in ensuring that value has been derived by the individual and promotes continuous improvement of the programme.

The method applied will vary, dependent on the development strands; however, whenever possible learning should be shared with colleagues/Group Leaders. Where forms are used, Members may wish to retain a copy within their Development Handbooks.

- Simple evaluation forms will be used for attendance at 'in house' events, whilst Members attending conferences/seminars will be required to provide feedback to Group Leaders/Overview and Scrutiny Chairs/Senior Member Development Officer, (as appropriate)
- Newly Elected Members will be invited to attend a meeting, towards the end of their first year of office, to discuss the effectiveness of the Induction Programme.
- A synopsis of the evaluation received will be submitted to the Member Development Panel, so it is able to take account of Members' feedback. This will help to improve the Programme, with a summary submitted to the Governance and Constitution Committee for monitoring purposes.
- The Democratic Services Team will contact Members to seek evaluation and feedback on courses that have been attended.
- The Personal Development Plan review process will give Members the opportunity to reflect on how the training they have received has impacted upon them and their performance. Any comments will be analysed by the Senior Member Development Officer, maintaining the strictest of confidence and will be brought to the attention of the Member Development Panel, if required, ensuring that confidentiality is preserved.

**Council Commitment:** *To use the feedback provided to amend and adapt the Member Development Strategy.*

**Member Commitment:** *To actively participate in providing feedback via the appropriate channels.*



## Recording Attendance/Achievements

The Member Development Programme aims to increase a Member's understanding of a subject, or help them learn a new skill. As many of the skills which Members have are transferable outside of local government, it is important that an individual's achievements are captured and recorded, with a training/development record being provided at the point the Member leaves the authority.

To ensure the Council obtains 'value for money' from the training it provides, Members' attendance at events is recorded, with a quarterly report submitted to the Member Development Panel.

### **Council Commitment: To**

- i) Maintain an accurate record of the training undertaken by each Member*
- ii) Present a training portfolio to each Member at the point they leave the authority*

### **Member Commitment:**

- i) Members will be expected to i) attend relevant sessions during the year, attendance to be recorded; and*
- ii) Inform the Senior Member Development Officer of any individual training undertaken for inclusion in their portfolio.*



# Supporting Member Development

## Access to Learning and Development

A number of Councillors have to balance other commitments with their roles as Ward Members; work and family being two examples. This means that the time available to Members for formal learning and development activities can be limited. By varying the times and locations of events, the Council ensures that as many Members as possible can be accommodated. The identification of dates for training events will be considered in advance, for example as part of the Council's Calendar of Meetings and Members will be encouraged to keep nominated dates free in their diaries.

For those who cannot attend on a regular basis and to reflect their individual learning styles, the Council will build up a Resource Library, to contain both electronic and hard copy reference material, which can be accessed by Members at a time convenient to them.

## Resources and Support

Cheshire East Council recognises that learning and development needs to be an integral part of the Council's planning process so that areas of priority-need can be anticipated. The Council is, therefore fully committed to providing the resources and support necessary to enable all of its Members to be fully effective in their various roles and will provide access to learning and development opportunities appropriate to their needs, roles and personal circumstances. A range of methods such as 'in house' events, external facilitators and partnership working will be used to deliver training in innovative ways, to make the best use of the resources available.

### **Council Commitment:**

*To provide adequate resources to support Members in their work and to deliver the Member Development Strategy.*

## Member Development Panel

Chaired by the Leader of the Council, the Member Development Panel oversees training and development activities on behalf of the Council and leads on the development of relevant strategies/policies/programmes for Members. Four Members of the Panel have been nominated as Member Development Champions for the authority, although all Panel Members are ambassadors for training and development; supporting and encouraging colleagues to identify their own individual training needs and undertake a programme of development.

The Panel's priorities are to -

- identify priorities for training
- discuss and agree procedures for its delivery
- monitor the effectiveness of the programme
- act as a conduit for the exchange of information from and to political groups and the Portfolio Holder for Resources

## Raising Awareness

Member Development opportunities are advertised on the intranet and invitations to attend key events are targeted at individuals, based on needs identified in their Personal Development Plans. Reminders relating to forthcoming dates are included in a weekly bulletin issued to all Councillors and notification of additional, ad-hoc training opportunities are circulated to Members who have expressed an interest in the subject matter.

To ensure that all Members are aware of discussions relating to Member Training and Development, the agendas and Minutes of meetings of the Member Development Panel are made available to all Councillors.



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