

OPEN

Audit and Governance Committee

28 July 2025

Member Training and Development Plan

Report of: Janet Witkowski, Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer

Report Reference No: AG/36/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 To consider how member training and development at Cheshire East Council could be repositioned to deliver the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report and be more responsive to emerging training needs as the Council's Transformation Plan is implemented.
- 2 The report is being submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee in line with Paragraph 45 of its Terms of Reference i.e., to review, advise, monitor and report to full Council on member training.

Executive Summary

- 3 In March 2024, the Council underwent a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge review; the aim being to support the authority in managing its concurrent challenges of financial sustainability and service improvement.

- 4 The LGA's report was published in July 2024 [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2024](#) - three of its recommendations (abridged below), relating directly to member training:

Recommendation 10: Give more time and emphasis to scrutiny across the Council.

Recommendation 12: Improve financial reporting mechanisms and training.

Recommendation 14: Launch a programme of training and development for Members (and officers).

- 5 Accordingly, the current Member Training and Development Programme and the Member Development Strategy have been reviewed, refocused and repositioned to deliver the improvements required. This report seeks approval of the changes proposed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Audit and Governance Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the Cheshire East Council Member Training and Development Plan, supplementary Committee training programmes, and the Member Development Strategy 2025- 2027, and that these documents be adopted with immediate effect.
2. Grant delegated authority to the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer to make changes to the Member Training and Development Plan and/or Member Development Strategy 2025-2027 as they consider are required, to ensure that future training priorities/training needs are addressed.
3. Agree that periodic reviews of the Member Training and Development Plan and the Member Development Strategy be carried out by the Audit and Governance Committee, such reviews to be included in the Committee's work programme.
4. Invite the Constitution Working Group to consider changing the Constitution, to make the mandatory elements of the committees' training programmes compulsory for its membership.
5. Agree that an annual report be submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee for the purpose of monitoring compliance

with any key performance indicators set out in the Member Development Strategy.

6. Agree that individual Member attendance at mandatory training events (including non-attendance) be recorded and published annually on the Council's website, recording to commence in July 2025 for publication by end July 2026.

Background

- 6 Our Members are representatives and champions of their communities as well as Corporate Parents for children and young people in our care. Members play a vital role in shaping the future of Cheshire East and improving the quality of life of local people.
- 7 To ensure that Members clearly understand their governance, decision-making and leadership responsibilities, a comprehensive training programme is delivered, which runs throughout their four-year term of office.
- 8 Cheshire East's Member Development Programme was last refreshed in 2022, using as its baseline the foundation skillset identified in the Local Government Association's (LGA) [Local Leadership Framework for Councillors | Local Government Association](#).

Repositioning Training and Development at Cheshire East

- 9 In March 2024, the Council underwent an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review; the aim being to support the authority in managing its concurrent challenges of financial sustainability and service improvement.
- 10 The LGA's report was published in July 2024 and contained three recommendations pertinent to member development, which are set out in paragraph 4. Within the body of its report, the LGA also highlighted other key areas for improvement i.e.,
 - Support Committees to focus on the strategic issues facing the Council and understand the different functions and responsibilities across the tiers of local government.
 - Improve training for Members in the areas of finance, equality and corporate parenting.
 - Provide further training and development to support elected members (and officers working with them) in having the skills and capacity

necessary to improve the performance of the Council's committee system.

- 11 In its present format, the Member Training and Development Programme does not focus enough on strategic decision-making, nor is it sufficiently in-depth to enable the Council to address the LGA's recommendations and support the aspirations of the Transformation Plan.
- 12 Given that training for members (and officers) will be one of the mechanisms driving forward change, work has been undertaken to review, refocus and reposition the Member Training and Development Programme and Member Development Strategy.

Repositioning Member Training and Development

- 13 Initial discussions have taken place with the LGA on identifying an alternative framework to build the programme around, which resulted in the following broad headlines being identified:
 - Geography of decisions.
 - Scrutiny within decision making.
 - Financial challenges.
 - Working within a committee system.
 - Skills and knowledge.
- 14 The programme attached to the report at Appendix 1 (hereafter referred to as the Member Training and Development Plan), has applied the above methodology to reposition the Council's approach to member training and development, in response to the recommendations in the peer challenge report.
- 15 Accordingly, some subjects which were previously delivered as stand-alone sessions have been combined into strategic or holistic themes and are marked as new in the plan, alongside additional content. The arrows at the side of the events indicates where the content overlaps or interconnects with another. Beginning with the welcome event, the Plan also suggests the sequence of delivery.
- 16 As far as possible, and to ensure the Plan is cost effective, the events set out in the Member Training and Development Plan will be delivered in-house, but specialist subjects will require external training to be commissioned e.g., scrutiny, building effective relationships and strategic decision making. Budgetary provision has been set aside for this.

- 17 The Member Training and Development Plan will cover a four-year period, starting from the Member's election to the end of their term of office. As delivery of the Transformation Plan gathers pace, new priorities for member training will emerge. Therefore, the Plan will be a living document, able to flex, respond and adapt to emerging issues.
- 18 To facilitate this, the Audit and Governance Committee is requested to grant delegated authority to the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer to make changes to the Member Training and Development Plan, as they consider may be required. As the Plan will come into force part-way through the current cycle, 2025 to 2027 will be used as a transitional period; to deliver the priority areas identified in paragraphs 4 and 10 of this report and enhance the content in advance of the local elections in 2027.
- 19 To ensure the Member Training and Development Plan continues to remain relevant and is responsive to change as the Council transforms, periodic reviews will be carried out by the Audit and Governance Committee; such reviews to be included in the Committee's work programme.
- 20 From 2025/2026, bi-annual briefings will be held for Members; the working title being Strategy and Success briefings. These events will provide an opportunity for the Council to reflect on past successes and look ahead at the opportunities/challenges facing the authority. The briefings will include topics such as the strategic direction of the Council, performance management, risk and assurance and emerging national and local issues. Any Member training needs raised at the Strategy and Success briefings will be considered by the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer for inclusion in the Member Training and Development Plan.
- 21 Members play a fundamental role in setting the strategic direction of the authority. It is vital therefore that they understand the legal obligations placed on the Council and its Members, to ensure effective and responsive governance and decision-making. For this reason, many of the subjects within the Member Training and Development Plan will be mandatory for all Members.
- 22 To strengthen Members' understanding of the decision-making process, committee specific training programmes have been developed, each based around core subjects common to all committees. To illustrate what these supplementary training programmes may look like, Appendix 2 provides *draft* programmes for two committees - Children's and Families and Audit and Governance.

- 23 On adoption of the Member Training and Development Plan, each committee will be invited to tailor the content of its own draft programme, in line with the Member Development Strategy. Committees will be expected to utilise free training support and resources offered by organisations such as the LGA, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) etc. These programmes will then sit underneath the Member Training and Development Plan and will provide subject focused training for the committees whilst ensuring that Members are aware of the expectations placed upon them, when appointed to the body concerned.
- 24 To bring the service committees in line with the requirements placed upon the Council's quasi-judicial bodies, Audit and Governance Committee is asked to invite the Constitution Working Group to consider changing the Constitution, to make the mandatory elements of the committee training programmes compulsory for its membership.
- 25 To promote awareness of the expectations placed on Members regarding their training and development, and to provide space in the calendar for training to be delivered, the following changes will be implemented:
- Additional information will be supplied to candidates standing for election, on the expectations placed upon Cheshire East Members in respect of their training and development; this will include placing a link to the Member Development Strategy on the [Standing as Cheshire East Councillor](#) web page. A copy of the Member Training and Development Plan will be included in the welcome pack issued following a Councillor's election.
 - To provide space for events and to assist with diary management, training days will be added to the approved calendar of meetings. These will not be subject specific but open for any training to be delivered. Ad hoc training/briefings which need to be arranged outside of the dates identified, will continue to be provided, as required.
 - The frequency of reminders to complete the online e-learning modules will be increased and regular drop-in sessions to help Members navigate the system will be scheduled in the calendar.

- 26 The peer challenge review report recommended that Members' attendance (including non-attendance) at training events should be made public. In proposing this recommendation to Audit and Governance Committee, it is important to note that only attendance at mandatory events and completion of the mandatory online programme would be recorded. At the end of each financial year, a Member's individual attendance record would be published alongside their record of allowances for the year past.
- 27 Furthermore, to monitor compliance with the programme, key performance indicators will be considered for inclusion in the Member Development Strategy, the statistical analysis from which to be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

Member Development Strategy

- 28 An essential component of a successful Member Training and Development Plan is to have a comprehensive and co-ordinated strategy in place. A well-structured strategy champions training and development as a tool which:
- Enables Members to work effectively and understand their governance role and decision-making responsibilities; and
 - Provide opportunities for Members to build their leadership skills which in turn, benefits both the individual and the Council.
- 29 Accordingly, the extant Member Development Strategy has been refreshed to bring it into line with the new Member Training and Development Plan. The strategy (Appendix 3) identifies the Council's commitments in respect of providing training and development opportunities for its Members but also sets out the expectations placed on Councillors in respect of their engagement with formal training and with development opportunities provided for them.
- 30 Once adopted, the Member Training and Development Plan together with the supplementary committee training programmes will sit underneath the Member Development Strategy. To ensure the content of the strategy remains relevant as the Council transforms, periodic reviews will be carried out by the Audit and Governance Committee; such reviews to be included in the Committee's work programme.
- 31 Further work will be undertaken in due course with the Director of People and Customer Experience to look at joint officer and member training in conjunction with the Local Government Association.

Consultation and Engagement

- 32 Consultation has taken place with the Local Government Association (LGA) to reshape the Member Training and Development Plan so that it can deliver the recommendations in the Corporate Peer Challenge Review report. Engagement with the Member Training and Development Plan by Members will be monitored by the Audit and Governance Committee.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 33 The recommendations in the report will enable the Council to implement the changes recommended by the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Review report, deliver change in respect of the Transformation Plan, support the development of its elected Members and fulfil commitment 3 in the [Cheshire East Plan 2025-29](#) (becoming an effective and enabling Council).

Other Options Considered

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Option	Impact	Risk
Change the Council's approach to member development, in accordance with the LGA's recommendations by refocusing the Member Training and Development Plan and Member Development Strategy.	This will bring about the improvements required in respect of governance, decision-making and improved understanding of Members' roles and responsibilities.	Taking no action will negatively impact on the Council's ability to manage its concurrent challenges of financial sustainability and service improvement.
Continue to deliver training based on the current programme of training and development.	The programme would not be sufficiently strategic in nature, nor in-depth enough to have a positive impact on Members' ability to make legally sound decisions and understand their governance role and responsibilities as the Council transforms.	The current approach would not be capable of delivering the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge Review report and the aspirations of the Transformation Plan.

Do nothing	Without a refocused approach the Council will not be able to move forward.	Taking no action will negatively impact on the Council's ability to manage its concurrent challenges of financial sustainability and service improvement.
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 34 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report; however, training and development is critical to ensuring elected Members are aware of the legislative framework within which local government decision making operates. The package of training and development set out in the Member Development Plan and Member Development Strategy is designed to support Members in making effective and legally sound decisions.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 35 Budgetary provision has been made available to commission the training outlined in the programme, subject to financial constraints. The use of online training or subsidised/free support from leading local government organisations will ensure that the Member Development Plan remains both relevant and cost effective, allowing best use of the resources available.

Human Resources

- 36 No human resource implications have been identified.

Risk Management

- 37 The risk of deferring or not adopting a new approach to Member Training and Development is set out in paragraph 33 of this report.

Impact on other Committees

- 38 The introduction of committee specific training programmes will provide a more subject focused approach to training for the body concerned, whilst ensuring that its membership is aware of the wider training requirements placed on all elected Members, as set out in the Member Development and Training Plan.

Policy

- 39 Corporate Plan Commitment 3: an effective and enabling council. The changes proposed will enable the Council to provide strong community leadership and governance for our residents, businesses and partners. To deliver our ambitions for Cheshire East, the Member Training and Development Plan will support the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025-29, the Transformation Plan, the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan, the Children's Services Improvement Plan, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-25 and the Digital Inclusion Plan 2023-2026.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 40 Cheshire East Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Mandatory equality, diversity and inclusion training has been included in the Member Training and Development Plan for Councillors which must be completed each year.

Other Implications

- 41 The recommended improvements in the report in respect of safeguarding children and young people, will improve the quality of decision making for the benefit of children and young people, and cared for children within Cheshire East.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy):</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	03/07/25	17/07/25
Janet Witkowski	Acting Monitoring Officer	03/07/25	15/07/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Julie Gregory	Head of Legal	Click or tap to enter a date	Click or tap to enter a date

<i>Other Consultees:</i> <i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Brian Reed	Head of Democratic Services	Click or tap to enter a date	Click or tap to enter a date

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Member Training and Development Plan Appendix 2: Member Development Strategy 2025 2027 Appendix 3: Draft committee training programme - Children's and Families Committee and Audit and Governance Committee
Background Papers:	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report 2021 Member Training and Development Plan 2023 - 2027 Member Development Strategy 2009