

# **Cheshire East Council Member Development Strategy**

**2025 -2027**

DRAFT

## **Foreword by the Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive**

Cheshire East is a great place to live, work and visit for many, and has so much potential to be a brilliant place for everyone. We are ambitious for our communities and places and know the importance of getting the basics right to help unlock the opportunities.

We have a shared vision and commitments for the borough; short and longer-term through the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 and have created an ambitious and robust set of plans to deal with financial, organisational and service challenges. Delivery of these will improve outcomes for our residents and the culture, governance and performance of the council.

We are committed to being a financially sustainable council, through transformation and continuous improvement, effective and responsive governance and decision-making. Strong leadership is key to delivering these plans and achieving an efficient, accountable, and enabling council.

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 for local people.

The Member Development Strategy recognises that, whilst many Members will have served for more than one term and will have built up their knowledge and experience, all Members need to be supported in their roles and have ongoing development needs especially through a period of change for the council. This may be as -

- A new Councillor, gaining core skills and knowledge of the council, its governance and decision-making structures and its services, and understanding their own statutory responsibilities i.e., as a corporate parent.
- A committee Member, continuously developing their decision-making skills to maintain the strategic direction of the Council.
- A Member appointed or soon to be appointed to a position of responsibility requiring new/additional skills or knowledge such as committee chair or vice chair.
- An experienced Member, refreshing their knowledge, skills and ways of working.
- All Members, to keep abreast of local and national drivers for change and improvement, especially in respect of local policies, priorities and service delivery.

This strategy aims to provide Members with the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. Only by having Members willing to embrace and participate in training and development opportunities, can the council deliver on its vision.

**Rob Polkinghorne**  
**Chief Executive**

**Councillor Nick Mannion**  
**Leader of the Council**

**Councillor Michael Gorman**  
**Deputy Leader of the Council**

## Member Engagement with the Strategy

*We need people from all backgrounds and experiences (to stand as a Councillor) who reflect the communities that they serve (paraphrased from Local Government Association publication, Make a Difference, Be a Councillor, published June 2022).*

Being a Councillor requires hard work and dedication, but the effectiveness of the strategy is reliant on all Members making a commitment to allocating time each year to develop themselves and to take an active part in events organised on their behalf.

The personal benefits for Members who invest time and commit to their development includes attaining skills which –

- Allows them to exert appropriate influence where it matters.
- Enables them to work effectively by understanding their governance roles and responsibilities.
- Builds personal capacity to deliver change and improvement by keeping up to date with the transforming face of local government.
- Provides opportunities to develop in the field of public service leadership by increasing confidence and the ability to fulfil personal ambitions for the benefit of the local community and oneself.

When undertaking their role as a Cheshire East Councillor, Members are expected to act in the best interests of the authority and its residents. Accordingly, the training and development delivered by Cheshire East has been specifically tailored to the role(s) Members perform within the authority.

Training which is designated as mandatory has been designed to:

- Align with the council's strategic priorities of unlocking prosperity for all, improving health and wellbeing and effective and enabling council.
- Explain the council's governance structures, the committee system and the scheme of delegation.
- Ensure that the council and its Members are compliant with the legal obligations placed upon them when making decisions.

As legislation and best practice is consistently changing, Members are required to refresh their skills each year.

To actively promote the Member Training and Development Plan, and manage a candidate's expectations in respect of the above, the [Standing as Cheshire East Councillor](#) page on the website includes a link to the Member Development Strategy.

The importance placed by Cheshire East Council on Member training and development, will also be promoted in the letters sent to candidates standing for election and in the welcome packs provided to newly elected Councillors.

## Member Training and Development Plan

Cheshire East Council is committed to supporting its Councillors in their complex roles as soon as possible after their election or following their appointment to a new role.

The four-year Member Training and Development Plan which sits underneath this strategy is both strategic and holistic in its approach and has been designed to flex, respond and adapt to emerging issues. It has five holistic themes within which the plan has been framed i.e.,

- Geography of decisions.
- Scrutiny within decision making.
- Financial challenges.
- Working in a committee system.
- Skills and knowledge.

The plan can be separated into three interconnected training and development programmes, each designed to support Members at key stages during their term of office i.e.,

- As a new Councillor, gaining core skills and knowledge of the council, its governance and decision-making structure and its services (*the induction programme*).
- As a Committee Member, continuously developing their decision-making skills to maintain the strategic direction of the council (*the induction programme, committee programme and annual programme*).
- As an experienced Member, refreshing their knowledge, skills and ways of working (*the induction programme and annual programme*).

To ensure the content of the Member Training and Development Plan remains relevant, periodic reviews will be carried out by the Audit and Governance Committee. Budgetary provision has also been made available to facilitate its delivery.

Opportunities to deliver training to a member/officer audience will be sought, to encourage shared learning, strengthen the Member/officer relationship and reduce costs.

Members will be supported so that they can develop the skills and knowledge appropriate to their position and responsibilities (see below), in recognition of the importance of their role within the council, with their residents, and with partner organisations:

[Leader and Deputy](#)

[chair-and-vice-chair-jd.pdf](#)

[Role of Opposition Spokesperson \(004\)](#)

Elected Member (under development)

## Member Training and Development Programmes

### Induction Programme

A high quality and comprehensive induction programme is provided for Cheshire East Councillors during their first year of office.

The programme is designed for both new and returning Members and unless otherwise stated **all sessions are mandatory**.

For Members elected following a by-election, Democratic Services will arrange a tailored induction course based on the same subjects, albeit in a more abridged format.

The Induction programme's key objectives are to:

- Enable Members to get up to speed quickly on the legislative framework within which local government decision making operates.
- Familiarise them with their governance and decision-making roles.
- Develop their knowledge and skills.
- Build professional working relationships with others both inside and outside of the organisation.

As a digital council, laptops will be supplied to each Member following their election. An orientation session on using the device will be provided at the point of collection. Members will also be offered bitesize training courses on the use of Windows, Outlook and Teams together with a session on using the Mod.Gov app to access and annotate agendas.

Priority will be given to those Members who require assistance to meet the desired basic standard.

The council's online learning platform Learning Lounge [Cheshire East Council: Log in to the site](#) can be accessed from any computer, tablet or mobile; at home or from a corporate building, which enables Members to complete their training at their own convenience, at a time to suit them, and to work at their own pace.

The Members' landing page not only provides access to the mandatory e-learning induction programme which Members must complete, (and forms part of the annual programme), it also includes access to the [Councillor hub](#) on Centranet and a resource library where Members can access past presentations.

The LGA button on the landing page, provides access to the LGA's own e-learning platform [Councillor hub | Local Government Association](#). Cheshire East recognises the benefits that can be achieved from Councillors making use of the LGA's training materials, and so relevant training opportunities and workbook material have been signposted for Members within the plan and programmes.

Members will be automatically enrolled onto the online learning programme, prior to the programme's launch in September each year. Regular reminders will be sent to Members to complete their training; with an additional reminder issued one month before the completion deadline. If the programme has not been completed at this point, the Member will be notified that the programme is overdue. This information will also be shared with the Monitoring Officer, the Member's Group Leader and Group Administrator on a bi-monthly basis.

As some Councillors may not be familiar with online learning or may need support to complete the modules, a short instruction video will be available on the Members' landing page. A mandatory training session will also be provided as part of induction to ensure all Members have the skills necessary to use the site. For those who need further support, drop-in sessions will be provided regularly during the year.

## Annual Programme

During a Member's term of office, an annual programme of training and development will be provided (starting in May/June for the main programme, September for the online programme).

Each programme will identify the events to be delivered, the target audience for each event, and attendance requirements (the majority being mandatory). As the programme is designed to be flexible to accommodate emerging issues or new ways of working, the final version may have changed from that advertised at the start of the municipal year but any updates will be notified to Members on the [Councillor hub](#).

Members will be kept abreast of new legislation and emerging corporate themes which may impact on the delivery of services or on their role, via bi-annual Strategy and Success briefings. Ad hoc service briefings will also continue to form part of the programme.

## Mandatory Training Programmes for Committees

Each one of Cheshire East Council's Committees has its own tailored training programme, based on a core set of shared skills relevant to all committees.

All Members (and in respect of Planning Committees, nominated substitutes) **must** attend (i.e., mandatory attendance) the training sessions arranged for the bodies to which they are appointed, as set out in the programme for that committee. This includes the briefing provided to each service committee at its first meeting following the local elections.

In respect of Members appointed to the Planning Committees, Audit and Governance Committee, Licensing Committee, Appointments Committee, General Appeals Sub-Committee and Staffing Appeals Sub-Committee, Members must attend and complete this training **before** they can participate in a meeting of the body concerned. To enable Members to directly engage with the trainer/facilitator and benefit fully from the training, these sessions will, unless exceptional circumstances apply, be delivered in person.

If a committee identifies a new training need for its membership, arrangements to deliver that training will be put in place by the officers supporting the Committee, provided that the training can be delivered internally, at no cost to the Council and is relevant to its work. Where there is a necessity to provide the training each year, the training programme will be updated.

If a training need emerges which is recommended for all Members of Council or requires external training to be commissioned, officers will discuss such requests with the Senior Member Development Officer **before any training is booked, or invitations issued**; to ensure budgetary provision is available and to secure dates which do not conflict with other Member events.

## Scheduling of events

To assist with diary management and to enable Members to attend key sessions/briefings (such as the Member Strategy and Success briefings), one day each month will be nominated as a training day in the approved calendar of meetings. Members will be encouraged to keep these dates free.

Except for the above, sessions will, as far as possible, be held at a time which is convenient to Members. This means that, wherever possible, two sessions will be offered, at lunchtime (between 12 noon and 2.00pm) and a twilight (5.30pm onwards) **unless** the subject -

- Can only be offered once due to cost.
- Scheduling is dependent on the trainer/facilitators availability and multiple sessions cannot be accommodated.
- The length of the session is more than 2 hours in duration.
- The subject is time sensitive.
- The event is held on a Friday (sessions on this day will not include a twilight).

Online training (i.e., those sessions provided via MS Teams) will not be recorded as a matter of routine, only where exceptional circumstances apply. This is because Members need to be present to be able to directly engage with the trainer/facilitator to benefit fully from the training.

However, unless there is a reason not to (for example the course material is sensitive), any slides from a presentation will be circulated to all Members (or those who attended the event) following the session and will be added to the Members' Resource Library on the Learning Lounge.

## Supplementary Training

### External courses

Members will receive many invitations to attend external courses. As funding for these types of events can only be met from the member training budget; priority must be given to funding the main programmes. Given the budgetary challenges facing the Council, applications from individual Councillors to attend fee paying courses are unlikely to be successful, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

There is nothing to prohibit a Councillor from paying to attend an external course themselves, but they would not be able to claim back the cost of the course, any travel or accommodation costs, or any other expenses, as voluntary attendance at a training event is not covered under the Scheme of Members' Allowances.

Members may request that Democratic Services book them onto a fully subsidised course, but where the Council makes the booking, the Member **must be able to provide assurance** that they are able to attend, as cancellations or non-attendance can result in significant recharges to the authority.

## Local Government Association (LGA) [Councillor and officer development](#) | [Local Government Association](#)

The Local Government Association (LGA) provides training and development opportunities to assist Councillors in their role and help Members to navigate complex issues, harness opportunities and address live and emerging challenges. A link to the site is provided from the Members' landing page on the Learning Lounge.

The Leadership Academy is the LGA's development programme for Councillors **in leadership positions**. In respect of Cheshire East Council this applies to the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council and the main Opposition Group Leader.

Member attendance at the LGA's annual conference will be restricted to these postholders and/or a Member who has been appointed to the LGA General Assembly by Cheshire East Council, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Attendance on a relevant Leadership Essentials programme will be offered to a Chair and/or Vice Chair of a Committee, provided that the course aligns with the Member's role, is fully subsidised and a need to attend has been identified.

Applications from other Members to attend fee-paying courses, will need the agreement of the Members' Group Leader, and the Head of Democratic Services to be approved. A waiting list may apply dependent on the availability of budgetary resources to fund the training, and the number of requests received in any one year.

## Members' Mental Health and Wellbeing

Members will be involved in complex strategic decision-making about what services Cheshire East can provide for its communities and residents. These decisions can be stressful, especially when it comes to explaining these decisions to, and dealing with the impact of those choices on residents.

To support Members, personal resilience has been made part of the mandatory online training programme and includes modules on:

- Mental Health Awareness.
- Personal Resilience.
- Managing Yourself and your Time.
- Managing your Priorities.

Only one of the wellbeing modules needs to be completed as part of the induction programme, but Members are encouraged to complete all four.

The [Councillor hub](#) on CEntranet contains [How to guidance for councillors](#) which includes advice on personal safety, and using social media.

The [Councillor hub | Local Government Association](#) contains workbooks on Facilitation and Conflict Resolution, Stress Management and Personal Resilience.

[About Able Futures | Able Futures Mental Health Support Service](#) is a nationwide specialist partnership set up to provide the [Access to Work](#) Mental Health Support Service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. It supports people in England, Scotland and Wales who are working and living with mental health difficulties. Members may access its services without referral from Cheshire East Council.

If Members have any support needs, either in respect of carrying out their roles or regarding their training and development, they should discuss them in confidence with the Senior Member Development Officer, in the first instance.

## **Evaluation and Performance Monitoring**

### **Evaluating the Strategy**

It is important that the Member Training and Development Strategy is regularly evaluated to ensure it remains relevant and effective. This will include monitoring the budget for training and development activities to ensure commissioned training delivers value for money. This must be an honest and constructive assessment so that any necessary improvements or enhancements can be made.

The Strategy and the Member Training and Development Plan/associated programmes (as set out below) will be reviewed periodically by the Audit and Governance Committee to ensure they keep pace with changes in legislation, council priorities and emerging issues. Outside of these reviews, delegated authority has been granted to the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer to make changes to the strategy and/or plan as necessary to ensure that future training priorities/needs can be addressed quickly.

### **Evaluating the Programmes**

To provide assurance to the public that Members have the core skills and knowledge required to perform their roles, attendance at, and completion of the mandatory training and e-learning sessions will be recorded and published annually on the Cheshire East website.

Receiving feedback from those who have completed the training is also key to ensuring that personal benefit has been derived from the programme. The method applied will vary dependent on the development strand but will include the following:

- All Members will be invited to attend an informal feedback event during their first year of office/re-election, to discuss the effectiveness of the Induction Programme. A synopsis of the evaluation received will be submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee, to inform future development.
- Where an event seeks feedback via an evaluation form, a summary of the responses received will be provided to the Senior Member Development Officer. Negative feedback will be discussed with the officers who commissioned/facilitated the training and may, where appropriate be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee and/or the Monitoring Officer.

## Evaluating Personal Development

The LGA has created a Political Skills toolkit (PSF), designed to support local councillors and those working with them to review and support individual development needs.

Members are encouraged to self-reflect on their development journey by completing the LGA Political Skills framework [read-revised-version-poli-243.pdf](#). Future training and development needs identified from this process should be discussed with the Members' Group or shared with the Senior Member Development Officer.

## Attendance/Performance Management

Attendance at mandatory events and completion of the mandatory online learning programme, will be recorded and will, in the first instance be shared with the Monitoring Officer/Political Group Leaders and Group Administrators on a bi-monthly basis; information supplied to the groups will be pertinent to their group's membership only. At the end of each financial year, each Member's individual attendance record will be published alongside their record of allowances for the year past.

This information, anonymised and in a statistical form, may also be reported via the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report and the Annual Governance Statement to Audit and Governance Committee.

Participation in training and development opportunities will be measured against key performance indicators (under development), the statistical analysis from which will be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

## Coaching/Mentoring

Mentoring can bring about improvements in the quality of political and managerial leadership and increase the role effectiveness and performance of Councillors at all levels. It can be formal or informal.

**Formal:** One-to-one mentoring is a formal developmental and learning technique aimed at increasing personal capacity, skills and learning i.e., peer mentoring. There is usually a cost associated with this type of support.

**Informal:** For Members new to local government, their own political group may be able to arrange for a mentor or buddy (someone with valuable experience and knowledge who offers guidance and support) to assist them whilst they become familiar with their role.

Access to coaching or mentoring support can be considered and facilitated dependent on the Member's need and budgetary availability. Members should discuss their request with their Group Leader/Senior Member Development Officer in the first instance.

Members may also be required to enter into a coaching or mentoring agreement, to address a councillor code of conduct or behavioural matter, following a standards complaint.

## List of Associated Documents

- Member Training and Development Induction Programme.
- Member Training and Development Annual Programme.
- Member Training and Development Committee Programmes.
- Induction Checklist (Member Version).
- Social Media Guidance (Member Version).
- [Parental Leave Policy for Cheshire East Council Members.docx](#) (Member Version)
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (Member Version under development).
- [Councillor hub](#) Cheshire East Council.
- [Councillor hub | Local Government Association](#) LGA.