



MENDIP DISTRICT COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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Document Name:	Member Development Strategy
Document Number:	1
Effective Date:	12.05.14
Date due for review:	12.05.16
<u>Reviewed:</u>	<u>11.07.16</u>
Responsible for review:	Member Development Group
Version:	<u>3 (Updated on 11 July 2016 to reflect the management restructure2</u>

Approved by Full Council on 11 July 2016

Version control

Number	Effective Date	Author / Reviewer	Comments (e.g. details of any policies being replaced)
1	10.12.12	Claire Dicken/Member Development Group	
2	12.05.14	Claire Dicken/Member Development Group	
<u>3</u>	<u>11.07.16</u>	<u>Donna Nolan</u>	<u>Updated to reflect management restructure</u>

Dissemination

Name or Team	Method	Date	Version
Claire Dicken	Constitution	12.05.14	
<u>Donna Nolan</u>	<u>Constitution (Version 3)</u>	<u>11.07.16</u>	<u>Restructure Update</u>

Publication of current version

	Location	Date of Publication

Approvals for current version

Name	Date of Approval
<u>Strategic Leadership Team (Version 3)</u>	<u>04.07.16</u>
<u>Full Council (Version 3)</u>	<u>11.07.16</u>

Approved by Full Council on 11 July 2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this strategy is to set out how the Council will provide Member Development. A Policy on Member Development was originally adopted by Cabinet on the 12 December 2011 and appended to the Constitution at [Appendix O](#). The Policy is reviewed by the Cabinet every 2 years.

This strategy has been developed by the Council's cross party Member Development Group, established by Cabinet to provide a framework for future Member training and development in order to achieve:

- Motivated and skilled Members of the Council.
- A consistent approach to Member training and development.
- Equality of opportunity.
- Well equipped Members who are confident and able to carry out their roles effectively.
- Raise awareness amongst Members of their own responsibilities

This document will clearly outline the Council's strategic aims and priorities which are aligned with the Corporate Plan. In order to be sufficiently flexible a wide range of learning styles and methods are used to make learning fully accessible to all Members. Whether this strategy is likely to be effective or not will be dependent on the commitment given by each and every Member to take an active part in the learning and development programme.

2. BACKGROUND

Mendip District Council recognises the fundamental and crucial role that elected Members play within the Council's decision making framework and within the communities in which they serve. The Council is committed to meeting the needs of its community through the provision of high quality public services. Local government is a vital part of democracy and its recent rapid change affords both challenge and opportunity for the role of an elected Member. It is important that Members understand their role as local champions of democracy, strong community leaders and decision makers.

According to the Local Government Association "Inspiring local communities and creating a better future for the people and places we represent takes ambitious leadership. Now, more than ever we need to ensure our politicians are bold and confident leaders, equipped to reinvigorate local governance, ensure strong democratic accountability, and support local government to make a difference, deliver and be trusted".

The South West Council Charter for Member Development provides a framework for local planning, self assessment, action and review to raise the standard of member support.

The self assessment demonstrated and evidenced the current status of the Council compared to the principles of the Charter to identify how the Council can progress:

- Continued commitment to member development
- Strategic approach to member development
- Member learning and development plan in place
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity
- Supporting Councillors

This document uses the same framework to identify the principles of good Member development and how Mendip District Council works towards and achieves those principles. In order for this strategy to be meaningful to Mendip however, it is also closely aligned to its own corporate and local community priorities.

3. CORPORATE COMMITMENT

The Leaders of the Political Groups, the Member Development Group and the Corporate Management Team are all committed to providing opportunities for all Councillors to develop appropriate levels of skills, knowledge and expertise to enable them to fulfil their individual roles.

The aims of this strategy reflects [the Corporate Plan](#)

The Council's Corporate Plan identifies its vision as: 'Mendip – a place to be proud of – where people, communities and businesses are encouraged to achieve their potential'.

The corporate values are:

- To put customers' needs first
- To treat people fairly and allow them to be heard
- To work in partnership and involve others
- To encourage a culture of achievement
- To be open to change and innovation while striving to improve
- To be good custodians of our environment

If the Council is to succeed in its corporate vision and values then it must ensure that its Councillors are supported and encouraged to undertake their role as community leaders and representatives hence the reason for aligning their training and development to these two key documents.

Soon after election Councillors are surveyed with regard to their skills and interests. The survey provides Councillors with a list of the Council's services that it is possible to learn about and become involved in. Councillors have displayed a good appetite for development sessions to increase their understanding of the Council's corporate

priorities how their role as Councillor affected and influenced the business of the Council generally. Development sessions should therefore continue to reflect the priorities of the Corporate Plan and trainers should clearly state to which priority their training will address.

Members have shown they want to gain a greater understanding of how the Council's service teams operate. Team shadowing would enable Members to improve their awareness in a structured and time efficient way which would undoubtedly help both Councillor and Officer in reducing the knowledge gap. Training should also reflect new legislation and statutory change thus the programme needs to remain flexible and adaptable.

4. SUPPORTING MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Resources and Support

~~The Corporate Support Manager and Corporate Manager for Governance, Assets and Public Spaces~~The Group Manager for Law and Governance have been appointed together with the Member Support Officer (MSO) to guide and support Members as per this strategy. The MSO is an active participant of the South West Member Services Network and will produce a report on the benefit of this participation to the Member Development Group on a regular basis.

The Member Development Group is a cross party group that was established by the Cabinet. It is involved in all training and development for Councillors on behalf of the Council and contributes to and influences the member development programme.

Elected Members are ultimately responsible for their own development although they are greatly helped in this by the MSO whilst the Portfolio Holder for Governance, Assets and Public Spaces takes political leadership and is accountable for the high level performance of the overall service together with the ~~Corporate Support Manager and the Corporate Manager for Governance, Assets and Public Spaces~~Group Manager for Law and Governance.

Member Development, in common with all other budgets will be allocated funding each year by Full Council. This budget needs to be carefully managed to ensure a high level of good quality training with sessions provided in house to allow for a sound dissemination of local and relevant knowledge. Budget expenditure will be monitored by the Portfolio Holder for ~~Governance, Assets and Public Spaces~~Finance, Governance and Corporate Services in conjunction with the MSO. The Member Development Group will review expenditure to ensure it provides continued value for money. Grant funding and subsidised training opportunities should be considered where appropriate together with funded courses through local government agencies. Full Council should review the budget available on an annual basis taking into account any reduction in external

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funding or externally funded training course. Councillor remuneration based on Member roles has been carried out on the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel. This should also be reviewed by Full Council annually.

Access to Learning and Development

Members have commitments outside of their Council role which means the time they have available is very limited. Any time they do have needs to be spent well and in a way that they consider to be beneficial, both to themselves and to the Council. Access to any skill or training opportunity must be as simple and straightforward as possible. All learning and development events will therefore take into account the working and life patterns of Councillors.

Learning and development should be provided in a variety of methods including face to face tutoring, self learning, electronic and active learning - practical demonstration or participation eg spending time within different service teams to learn about their work first hand or going off site to see first hand how the Council provides its services or how other Councils do so. Most development sessions will be repeated at different times of the day including Saturdays on occasions and weekday evenings, avoiding where possible dates already occupied by other Council meetings. The venue will be convenient to all and will comply with the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010. Council meeting rooms, external venues and even in the Councillors own home will be used where applicable.

The MSO should investigate the potential of new methods of learning as they evolve to ensure that all Members have equal opportunities to access the learning and development they need. The MSO should carry out surveys of all Members to determine what their needs are and how they would like to access their learning programme. This information should be used to create a useful programme of events which then reflect the feedback received.

The options to help Members develop their knowledge and skill base should not be restricted to specific or dedicated sessions.

The Council is committed to supporting and helping all Members to improve their skill and knowledge. As such it enables those with dependents to take advantage of the Council's Allowance Scheme which provides funding to purchase the time of childcare or other relevant carers.

Members will be informed about training and development opportunities in a variety of formats. The dates and venues of most internal courses will be given in the Member development programme. To enable structured and timely promotion thus encouraging greater take-up, detailed emails for each session will also be produced at least two weeks beforehand. The training programme itself will also be delivered in a variety of ways to meet different learning needs and preferred styles of learning. All training

presentations and notes will be made available electronically and in hard copy on request to afford the greatest access.

Raising Awareness

The Council has a role to play in raising awareness to existing Members about the development opportunities available to them but it also has a role to try and instil some interest amongst the general public about becoming a Councillor at the next election.

Every public meeting agenda includes a public participation slot for members of the public to speak and to air their concerns on behalf of their community. They also have the option to raise issues with their local ward Members and to attend meetings to improve their knowledge of how the democratic process works

Potential candidates can attend tailored events, organised prior to the main elections which are attended by Members from all parties and members of the Corporate Management Team. Marketing of these sessions will include a wide mix of methods and locations so that the maximum number of people can be reached. This will include local media, website and literature in local libraries and other public places. Promotional material must make every effort to engage with all members of Mendip society including those whose first language is not English, young people and those from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

To forge a greater understanding of the Councillors' role and provide something which people can relate to, case studies written about individual experiences may be used. These case studies will clearly demonstrate what is expected of each elected Member, what is involved in the role and what benefits there are to both them and their community.

5. CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT

Induction

The Council is committed to ensuring that all new Councillors are provided with a comprehensive induction when first elected. As a consequence all new members meet with the MSO and are provided with a Member Information Folder which contains details about the Council and its member development programme. Awareness sessions provided by the council's Monitoring Officer will be held within the first four weeks of each election to provide advice on ethics, probity, the Code of Conduct and declarations of interest. It may be possible for new Members to have the opportunity to take part in familiarisation sessions and mock-ups of Council meetings whilst key senior officers including members of the Corporate Management Team will spend time with all new and returning Members to ensure they are fully aware of the development available and the role expected of them.

A description of the Members role is identified within section 3 of [the Council's Constitution](#) and the role of a Member is clearly set out in the Candidates Information Booklet which will be made available prior to all new local government elections or can be downloaded from the [Council's website](#). The Council will encourage experienced Members and Officers to share their expertise with newly elected members. Councillors are able to take advantage of a buddy scheme on request.

Member Development Programme

Councillors will be encouraged to pro-actively participate in training and to attend arranged development sessions especially when these are relevant to their own portfolio or personal development. Some training and awareness sessions are compulsory for some committee members as they relate to legislation and the need for sound decision making. All identified training whether compulsory or voluntary will be considered by the Member Development Group. An illustration of the Member development cycle is illustrated at appendix A.

A timetable of all learning opportunities will be mapped and identified in a table which will aim to include at least one formal development session per month.

Identifying Development Opportunities

Members will be offered training and development which suits the position they hold both in the Council and the wider community to enable them to undertake their specific role and fulfil their responsibilities. Any training needs identified by Members should be sent to the MSO, who can then research and recommend possible courses or other activities that will meet that need.

The Member Development Programme will provide sufficient details to enable Members to make a decision whether to attend certain training sessions or not. This detail should include a location, time and date. Members should make every effort to attend any courses. If attendance is not possible then as much notice as possible should be given to the MSO so that an alternative delegate may be nominated to attend. Where there is a problem with courses or activities being booked but not attended the matter will be referred to the Member Development Group and Group Leaders for resolution.

The MSO will take the lead in implementing the training and development policy by organising relevant courses, booking attendance, paying costs and advising on best practice. The MSO will provide information in respect of training opportunities and reports on training attendance and effectiveness. All course bookings will be cleared by the relevant Portfolio Holder and made through the MSO so that a record of all learning provided to Members during the year can be kept and the necessary commitments against budget provision can be made.

Shared Learning

The Council recognise that sharing the provision of skills and training is often beneficial both in terms of good practice and cost. The Council will continue to investigate sharing possibilities with neighbouring local authorities and external partners. Parish/Town Councillors and partner organisations will be invited to attend development sessions with District Councillors where appropriate to offer community support as well as ensure consistency and understanding.

Joint training between Officers and Members will also be considered especially where the two can interrelate for the benefit of both. Members can access external online training via websites from local government agencies such as the LGA and www.moderncouncillor.com so should be encouraged to do so.

The Council realise that elected Members often have a wealth of knowledge and expertise from a wide range of work related and social roles. Peer to peer training takes a different approach than that utilised by professional tutors but can be highly effective. Members will be encouraged to share their expertise with their colleagues in a way which promotes greater understanding of the role each of them will perform.

Seminars and Conferences

It is not always possible for every Member to attend specific training, seminars or conferences. Time restrictions, family commitments and cost prohibit this to a great extent but this does not mean that those unable to attend should not glean some benefit from it. Presentations of all training and notes from seminars and conferences should be made available to Members upon request. Those attending the training, seminars or conferences should be willing to take notes and provide a copy of the presentation for it to be shared in this way. The MSO should pro-actively seek and make available any information which may of interest to the Members and Members should be encouraged to do likewise.

6. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Personal Development

The Council will identify the training needs of individual Members by carrying out a skills audit shortly after all main District Council elections. These needs will be reviewed regularly and each Member will be given the opportunity to consider their personal development. Any plans should link to the priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan. The MSO will keep information about the corporate priorities and the training identified.

Any development which does not comply with these priorities will be reconsidered by the Members Development Group.

Personal development planning may be used to help members update their knowledge and learn new skills which will help them to be more effective in their role and in the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities. Such plans enable Members to set goals for themselves during their term of office which then provides them with tangible evidence of their achievements. This can be very useful to Members especially if they are considering re-election. When starting a plan Members must consider their current role within the Council in addition to any future political aspirations.

Leadership Development

Succession planning is necessary to ensure that the Council always has Members with appropriate skills and knowledge who are able to change their role or to take on a more demanding one. Where appropriate the Council will actively sponsor the participation of relevant Councillors on leadership development programmes such as the Leadership Academy which it has done previously. On an annual basis the Corporate Management Team will discuss, with the Leaders of the Council, which Member should be put forward for Leadership Academy training, when available.

The Council will also investigate the benefits and options in respect of mentoring. Once again this has previously been used by members of Scrutiny and Cabinet and should be explored further. The use of leadership training and mentoring must be documented and evaluated in the same way as all other forms of Member development.

Joint training between the Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team should be encouraged to create greater understanding and consistency. The Chief Executive and Council Leaders currently meet regularly in feedback sessions to discuss member development which should continue if both parties consider it to be useful.

7. MONITORING AND REVIEW

Evaluation

It is helpful for courses to be evaluated for their usefulness and relevance through the completion of a feedback form by each participant. Feedback will be collated by the MSO. Details of all training and development courses will be summarised and a report provided to the Member Development Group for discussion, to suggest future improvements, ensure value for money and monitor performance against expected objectives. Evaluation summaries should also be considered by the relevant Lead Officer and the Portfolio Holder. Information from the evaluation procedure and experience gained by those involved will continue to inform future plans for Member development.

The feedback and evaluation procedure helps to identify which training has been successful and which has not using feedback forms which focus on intended key training outcomes. Having identified unsatisfactory learning the MSO and relevant Manager will review and change it to ensure that it does deliver to the required standard in the future.

8. CORPORATE PRIORITY ACTIONS

- To continue to link all Member training to the Corporate Plan and governing legislation
- To continue to carry out surveys of Members about member development
- To raise awareness about all development opportunities in a variety of ways to maximise access.
- Evaluate all training courses and provide relevant feedback to the Lead Officer and the Member Development Group
- To provide a comprehensive support and induction programme for all newly elected Members.
- To expand and promote the Buddy Scheme
- To actively seek shared learning activities
- To provide information on all upcoming seminars and conferences
- Provide Members with sufficient information to enable them to make an informed decision about their training requirements
- Pro-actively seek different ways of promoting the role of an elected Councillor

9. MEMBERS' COMMITMENT

- To strive to have a personal development plan
- To be receptive to the opportunities available
- To complete a course evaluation form after all training and development activity undertaken
- As a newly elected Member, to attend the sessions offered.
- To make every endeavour to attend all development activities arranged but will inform the MSO as soon as possible if unable to do so.
- To consider what peer training they could provide to their colleagues
- To respond in a timely fashion to any request for information from the MSO
- To be fair, honest and respectful to others when carrying out their role
- To undertake the required mandatory training

Appendix A – Member Development Programme Cycle

