

MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2023 - 2027

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FOREWORD & COMMITMENT

The primary role of a Member is to represent their ward and the residents who live within it. Members provide a bridge between the community and the Council. As well as being an advocate for your local residents and signposting them to the right Officers within the Council, you will need to keep them informed about the issues that affect them.

In addition, Members have an important role in providing community leadership. Councils work in partnership with local partners and other organisations, including the public, voluntary, community and private sectors, to develop a vision for their local area and to find ways to work collaboratively to improve local services and quality of life for its residents. Members have a crucial role in this process.

As a Member, you will also contribute to the development of Council policies and strategies, bringing the views and priorities of your local area to the discussion. How and where you do this will depend on the Committees and other forums to which you are appointed. However, strategies contained in the Council's Policy Framework must be signed off by full Council, on which every Member sits. Aside from these key responsibilities, Members are also obligated to maintain high standards of conduct in their role by adhering to the Council's Code of Conduct which encompasses **the Nolan Principles of Public Life: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, Leadership**. Members are obligated to register disclosable and pecuniary interests as set out in the Code on their register of interests and must ensure they make balanced and legal decisions.

This strategy is based on four key principals underpinning which underpin the Council's corporate values. These are:

- 1. Customer focused;**
- 2. Accountable;**
- 3. Professional; and**
- 4. Ambitious**

The learning & development four-year development plan which sits at the heart of the strategy is aligned to the Council's electoral cycle, with the aim of supporting members to carry out roles and responsibilities. This Strategy will have the flexibility to meet the needs of new Members elected to the Council in 2023 (and in the event of any by-elections) as well as meeting the needs of experienced Members. The Programme will be continuously monitored and evaluated throughout its life cycle to ensure it keeps pace with new priorities and the refreshed Wirral plan.

INTRODUCTION

Priorities

This Strategy sets out the Council's priorities for member development which are aligned with the Nolan Principals. These priorities are:



Also interwoven into the strategy is the 21st Century Councillor, a study undertaken by the university of Birmingham and North West Employers and promoted by the LGA which looked primarily looked at the current context and demands of Members, at a time of budget reductions and the changing public sector landscape. The study looked at the roles, skills and support needed to enable individual Members to undertake their crucial front-line role of making connections with their communities and building a strong democratic place.

WIRRAL PLAN 2023 - 2027

The Wirral Plan is a key document of the Council’s policy framework, setting out the vision and priorities for Wirral as a place. The Plan has been aligned with the Council’s Improvement Plan which sets out the vision and priorities for organisational change and improvement that will ensure the Council is in the best shape to lead Wirral partners in achieving the Wirral Plan vision.

The Wirral Plan was developed following engagement with Members, staff, and partners in 2020/21. As the Council moves to a Whole Council Election scheme in 2023, there is an opportunity to re-set the Wirral Plan as a four-year programme for the full term of the new administration. This work will be conducted during 2022/23 to enable a new 2023/27 plan to be presented to Council in the Summer 2023.

The Plan is built around the following five strategic priorities for the Council and its partners. The table below gives a high-level summary of how the Member Learning and Development Strategy 2023-27 will support the five main themes of the Wirral Plan.

Wirral Plan Themes	Action
Sustainable Environment	The strategy will provide Members with a baseline of information to ensure they fully understand this theme within the Wirral Plan, and within the Council’s decision-making process. Carbon Literacy training will be made available to all Members.
Brighter Futures	All Members of the Council are corporate parents. This is the name given to an organisation or person who have special responsibilities to children and young people who are under the care of the Local Authority. Training will be given to Members on the responsibilities of being a corporate parent; this includes safeguarding guidance which will ensure that Members are aware of how to protect children and young people both when making decisions and in the community.
Inclusive Economy	Regular learning and development will be offered to ensure that Members understand the Councils’ Finance and Budget setting process and how this, alongside strategies such as Community Wealth Building can help build an Inclusive Economy.
Safe and Pleasant Communities	Mandatory Planning and Licensing training will be provided for Members who sit on those Committees which will assist in the delivery of this pledge. In addition, training modules such as online safety and social media training will assist Members when working online.
Active and Healthy Lives	A welfare policy which actively promotes happy, healthy, and engaged elected Members. A robust Member wellbeing and support package will help facilitate in the delivery of the Healthy and Active Lives pledge. Members will also be provided with additional training to help them support their constituents and communities. Focus will be given on preventative measures rather than statutory requirements.

ROLE OF THE MEMBER SUPPORT STEERING GROUP

The Member Support Steering Group (MSSG) was formed to help aid the introduction of the Committee System in 2020. Membership of the group is appointed by the Constitution and Standards Committee on an annual basis and meets quarterly.

The role of the group is to review annually the New Member Induction Programme, Member Learning & Development Strategy and Member Welfare Policy, as well as to provide cross-party strategic leadership on all Member learning and development matters. Regular reports are also submitted to the MSSG regarding the development of and performance of the Councillor Portal. The Portal is a members enquiry reporting tool as well as an information sharing space, and information is gathered as to how this can be improved and developed.

The overall objectives of the MSSG is to:

- Explore, research, gather insight, examine, and develop and implement new innovative methods, approaches, and initiatives to improve member culture, development, and support.
- Drive continuous improvement in member culture, development, and support within political groups.

The MSSG also considers training requests by individual members and monitors the Member Learning and Development budget. The MSSG also submits an annual report to the Constitution and Standards Committee.

HOW MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ARE IDENTIFIED

The Strategy has been developed through extensive consultation and collaboration. Officers have undertaken a survey of elected members, consulted with other Local Authorities and the Local Government Association and received feedback from the Member Support Steering Group.

The Strategy has been designed with consideration to the Councils Core values and the ever-changing needs of the community and organisation. Regular surveys of Members, both newly elected and longstanding, alongside information gathered through the MSSG and individual requests. A recent survey undertaken by Democratic Services and the Learning & Inclusion team identified the following key themes as priorities:

Corporate Finance - Training in respect of Revenue and Capital, Budget development and budget performance monitoring including Council Tax, Revenues and Benefits.

Communication - Dealing with casework, enquiries from constituents and social media.

Personal skills - Such as public speaking, chairing meetings and delivering comments and ideas within committee meetings.

Understanding decision making, governance, policy formation and scrutiny.

Development of IT skills – Depending in individual skills; basic, intermediate and advanced IT training over a four year cycle essential for hybrid meetings, casework, research and report reading.

2023-27 MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Access to Learning and Development

All Members will be given access to development opportunities that enhance their skills and knowledge to meet their immediate training needs and to respond to the changing needs of the Borough. Care will be taken to better identify and remove disadvantages or barriers that Members feel prevent them from taking advantage training opportunities by ensuring they are readily accessible to all.

Where possible the Council will support Members to develop skills and knowledge that will be useful to them in preparation for enhanced roles such as chairing a Committee meeting. Enabling Members to attend events and undertake learning and development activities is a key priority. In order to facilitate this:

- Formal sessions will be programmed in advance to try to ensure that they do not clash with the committee cycle, Political Group meetings and other major civic events.
- Activities will be programmed at different times of the day to accommodate individual commitments where possible.
- Training will be held via Microsoft teams, to allow Members flexibility in their working day. Sessions will be recorded, and Members will be given access to FLO to allow them to undertake training at a time convenient to them.
- Where appropriate, training will be held face-to face.

FLO

FLO is the Council's learning and development platform. FLO makes it easier to develop skills, knowledge, and experience, with supercharged search and artificial intelligence.

Members can consume and share a wide variety of content, on any device and at any time that suits, and it isn't just e-learning – Flo gives access to a wide range of content, both internal and external to the Council, including courses, videos, podcasts, blogs, and articles.

Members will be assigned a learning pathway which will enable them to access all essential learning identified within the Member Development Plan. plan.

FLO learns what you're interested in and will recommend relevant learning content based on interests, skills, and roles. No log in is required, as it is linked to an individual's email address, and it will be linked both on the Council's intranet page and within the Councillor Portal.

Delivery

Wirral Council recognises the many different ways to deliver training and development. In addition to more formal training sessions, Members will have access to the following,

- Members Portal and FLO which hold various training videos and useful documents
- Briefing notes and learning guides.
- Member View - a weekly briefing from the Council’s Communications Team
- External conferences, seminars, and network meetings.
- In house workshops presented by senior managers and specialist officers.
- An Information Library from a variety of sources such as, LGA workbooks Local Government Information Unit blogs (LGIU)

Review

The Strategy will be an iterative process, regularly reviewed, and adapted to Members needs and requirements. Monitoring will be taken annually.

Review of the Strategy will be taken via several channels.

- Evaluation and impact of training and learning opportunities
- Annual Member personal development survey
- Review via the Members Support Steering Group as an annual report
- External review, publications, and research

Year 1

Mandatory	Specific	Specialism
Corporate Parenting Finance Licensing Planning	New Member Induction Committee Specific Training Audit and Risk Management Code of Conduct / Decision Making Carbon Literacy Social Media Equality and Diversity	Chairs Training - New and Existing Chairs Leadership Training: • Policy Development • Local Government Finance IT Basic Training Advanced Personal Development Mental Health Awareness / First Aid Overview and Scrutiny The Effective Ward Councillor Supporting Your Constituents With Complex Issues GDPR

Year 2

Mandatory	Specific	Specialism
Corporate Parenting Finance Licensing Planning	Committee Specific By Election Induction (if required)	Chairs Training - Continuous Development and Future Chairs Leadership Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation and Conflict Resolution • Influencing Skills Advanced Personal Development IT Intermediate Training Overview and Scrutiny Mental Health Awareness / First Aid

Year 3

Mandatory	Specific	Specialism
Corporate Parenting Finance Licensing Planning	Committee Specific By Election Induction (if required)	Chairs Training - Ongoing and Future Chairs Development Leadership Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement and Leadership • Economic Development Advanced Personal Development IT Advanced Training Mental Health Awareness Overview and Scrutiny

Year 4

Mandatory	Specific	Specialism
Corporate Parenting Finance Licensing Planning	Committee Specific By Election Induction (if required)	Chairs Training - Ongoing and Future Chairs Development Leadership development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political collaboration • Influencing skills Advanced Personal Development IT Advanced Training Chairs Training Leadership Mental Health Awareness Overview and scrutiny

By-election

When Members join the Council as a result of a by-election, Democratic Services will arrange tailored induction courses that introduce the varied elements of the year 1 programme and ensure adequate mentoring support is available to ensure new Members do not feel 'adrift'. Opportunities to observe committees and other operations will form part of this induction.

Members Wellbeing

Member support and wellbeing is of utmost importance to the Council. The Member welfare resource guide is attached as an appendix to this report.

Support available to all Members includes,

- Access to the Employee Assistance Programme
- Resilience and mental wellbeing training
- Discounted membership at Wirral Council owned gyms
- Access to FLO for targeted learning on Mental Health, Financial Wellbeing and managing stress.
- Individual support from the Member Support Team if required.

Personal safety

The personal safety of Members and staff is of utmost importance to Wirral Council. Comprehensive guidance can be found in the LGA guide, Personal-safety-for- councilors. Members are encouraged to read this to provide guidance on how to keep themselves safe whilst out and about in the Community. If you are unsure of a situation or feel unsafe, always speak to the Democratic Services Team in the first instance for advice.

Team around the Member

To assist Members a team of officers are available to provide support in guidance, both with personal development and wellbeing.

- **Anna Perrett - Principal Democratic Services Officer: Policy and Member Development**
Email: annaperrett@wirral.gov.uk
- **Victoria Simpson - Senior Member Support Officer**
Email: victoriasimpson@wirral.gov.uk
- **Andrea Shillinglaw - Executive Policy Support**
Email: andreashillinglaw@wirral.gov.uk
- **Gill Pinch - Executive Policy Support**
Email: gillpinch@wirral.gov.uk

Accessibility For Disabled Councillors

The Council has a legal duty under The Equality Act 2010 to make any reasonable adjustments you need to carry out your work as a Councillor. You will be asked upon your election if you require any reasonable adjustments to be made in order for you to effectively carry out your work as an elected member. Examples of this may be access to specialist equipment or adaptations to your working environment.

You are not responsible for the costs of any reasonable adjustments. The document below supplied by the Local Government Association provides further information.

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Improving%20access%20to%20local%20government%20elected%20office%20for%20disable%20people_0.pdf

APPENDICES

- 1. New Member Induction Booklet**
- 2. Councillor Handbook**
- 3. Criteria for Approval of Training Requests**
- 4. Members Welfare Booklet**