

Member development strategy




2020 - 2024



Introduction

Bracknell Forest Council recognises the importance of learning and development for all those who work to deliver good public services. The council has sought to continuously improve learning and development for councillors, in the knowledge that organisations with effective learning and development are open, accountable and make better decisions. The member development strategy provides a framework for the council to deliver effective member learning and development.

The council's commitment to member development has created strong foundations for the new strategy, which is the latest in a series of progressions:

2020	Strategy 4: maintain Charter Plus during economic challenges and technological opportunities	
		
2016	Strategy 3: maintain Charter Plus during economic challenges	✓
		
2012	Strategy 2: achieve SEE Charter Plus accreditation	✓
		
2008	Strategy 1: maintain South East Employers' Charter accreditation	✓

The vision for member development

For all members to be engaged in the learning and development programme, taking advantage of learning opportunities and accessing support to fulfil their roles and help the council deliver its services and objectives for the benefit of the Borough and its residents.

Strategic context

The council is committed to providing the strong leadership, financial stability and corporate governance to make sure that core services are maintained. We will establish a framework for delivering services that allows us to adapt, innovate, find new ways of working and, in some cases, reduce what we do. To do this, it is essential that members are provided with the information and development opportunities they need to respond effectively.

The Council Plan focuses on the things that matter most to residents and is based upon a narrative which recognises Bracknell Forest as “the borough of opportunity.” Bracknell Forest is a place where diversity is recognised as a strength and where reducing inequalities benefits everyone. We will encourage vibrant local groups and work to ensure everyone feels connected and able to actively participate.

To deliver on all our objectives and ensure that Bracknell Forest stays prosperous and remains a good place to live, work and play, The Council Plan focuses on 6 strategic themes:

- value for money
- economic resilience
- education and skills
- caring for you and your family
- protecting and enhancing our environment
- communities

Elected members are accountable for the delivery of the Council’s objectives. This relies on them having the key skills and knowledge to help provide the best possible services to residents and to support hidden communities across the borough.



Guiding principles

1. Continue to build on established activity

There is continued senior level commitment to member development across councillors and officers, with direct support provided by a dedicated member services team.

The development programme benefits from the expertise of departments across the council at all levels and there is an embedded expectation of high-quality training and support which generates strong engagement in development activities.

This strategy will maintain and build upon these key strengths of member development at Bracknell Forest. Appendix A gives details of how these strengths will be sustained.

Success: achieving Charter Plus accreditation in April 2021, and a successful interim assessment in late 2022.

2. Recognise the requirements of the councillor role and deliver training and support that is tailored to the role

Councillors use many skills and balance varied responsibilities. Strong community leadership, clear decision-making and effective scrutiny are supported by a good understanding of council policies.

This strategy will focus on councillors as community leaders, rather than as professional officers with technical expertise. It recognises that detailed service knowledge is provided by officers and will enable councillors to support the development of and scrutinise successful strategies, rather than deliver services.

Success in this area will further establish councillors within their communities and help set realistic expectations with residents. It will enable councillors to step back from detailed processes and work within their broad community role.

3. Ensure content is engaging, relevant, up to date and pitched at an appropriate level

Builds on principle 2 and ensures that all training focuses on what is essential and relevant for the role, pitched to the needs of the members.

Sessions will recognise the spread of experience across members and strive to include aspects of development for all.

As well as foundation knowledge, sessions will review what has changed and will concentrate on delivering more of the Bracknell Forest experience through discussions and case studies.

Success will be measured using a more focussed evaluation approach to understand whether content has been designed and delivered at the appropriate levels.

4. Use a diverse and flexible range of delivery methods

Changes in technology are creating new opportunities for development and training. There is also scope to review our approach in more traditional areas. This strategy commits to delivering elements of the programme in different and innovative ways, with an emphasis on providing flexibility to increase relevance. Different formats will also support our resilience during challenging times or business disruption.

This approach recognises that people learn in different ways, have varying needs and different time constraints so this principle underpins the commitment to ensure all members are able to access high quality development. It also aims to get maximum benefit from our resources against a background of economic challenges.

We will use feedback to identify suitable topics and evaluation to understand how successful we have been.

5. Capitalise on opportunities to work with others

This strategy will look for opportunities to partner with other organisations. Suitable opportunities are those where a partnership will enhance the development activity, or where partnering achieves the learning objective more efficiently. The strategy will always ensure equality of provision regardless of political party and will build on this by seeking out opportunities for cross-group member development support.

Success will be measured through annual reporting showing an increase in the proportion of shared activities compared with previous years.

Actions

Principles 1 and 5 uphold the solid foundation already in place at Bracknell Forest which the other principles build on to deliver enhancements. This section describes how these improvements can be realised in our member development approach.

Principle 2 puts the role of councillor at the heart of member development. To support this, member services will work with other officers to create councillor journeys for relevant services. A councillor journey describes the touchpoints for a councillor in the cycle of a service or project. For example, a journey could describe the school admissions process through the year or outline the life cycle of a planning application from a councillor perspective. The journey should highlight when and why a councillor might interact with the process, either through normal council business or on behalf of a resident or stakeholder.

Councillor journeys should form the basis for any training and development associated with that topic. A key theme of councillor journeys is identifying opportunities to tackle inequalities as Bracknell Forest recognises that addressing inequality provides a strong foundation for cohesive and confident communities. Councillor journeys will centre the training on the role of community leader, decision-maker or critical friend with a clear understanding of how to support, enhance or scrutinise the process to deliver for all our communities.

Driven by principle 3, officers will agree early in the planning stages what knowledge or skill councillors will get from a particular piece of training. Session planning should focus on the benefits of councillors having this ability - for the councillor, for their residents and for the service. Member services will seek to maximise training which benefits all three, as shown below.

Who benefits from councillors having this knowledge or skill



For each topic, member services will also aim to introduce more stretching learning objectives for returning councillors who express an interest in that area via their personal development plan.

Guiding principle 4 suggests more e-learning provision and this strategy seeks to explore other options as well. Member services will focus on retaining the benefits of interactive learning despite the distance. We will prioritise areas where the remote activity can enhance the experience, for example using webinars, virtual syndicate rooms and other interactive resources. Members are already building their experience of remote meetings and interactions and we intend to maintain this as part of the strategy.

Roles and responsibilities

Member development has good engagement across all levels at Bracknell Forest Council. The table below outlines the interests of relevant groups in achieving the strategy,

Delivery of strategy			
Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed
Member services	Steering group	Members CMT External partners Senior officers	Council SEE Public (via report)

Actions and responsibilities in support of member learning and development	
<p>The Member Development Charter Steering Group will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead and innovate the Council's approach to member development, in conjunction with the Executive Member; • monitor the progress of the member development strategy; • review the strategy at least annually and update as required to ensure it continues to meet members' needs; • advise officers and the Council on member development activities, and • report annually to the Council on the progress of member development. 	<p>Councillors will be responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying their own learning and development needs, including any requirements that build resilience against disruption to business as usual • engaging in personal development planning • participating in a feedback and reflection process (previously 360 self-assessment process) • engaging in the member development programme • creating a continuous learning environment that focuses on dignity, openness and respect for other's voices • sharing learning with others, and • accessing learning opportunities
<p>Directors and senior officers will enable their teams to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide briefings to members on key areas of service delivery and development; • work with member development officers to outline councillor journeys for their services; • positively contribute to the development and delivery of the member development programme, and • support the work of the Member Development Charter Steering Group 	<p>The Head of Democratic and Registration Services, with the Governance and Scrutiny team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop and evaluate the member development strategy; • seek to maintain the Charter plus standard; • help to identify member learning and development requirements, and work collaboratively to facilitate their delivery; • provide development in a range of formats which reflect different learning needs and offer resilience against business disruptions • promote the member development programme; • hold the dedicated budget for member learning and development (see Appendix B for details of priorities), and • represent the Council at relevant regional and national network meetings

Monitoring for success

The Governance and Scrutiny team will monitor the progress of the strategy. Indicators of success include:

- positive feedback in member services surveys
- engagement in the Personal Development Plan and feedback and reflection processes
- engagement in the Member Development Programme
- positive satisfaction scores for learning and development activities
- positive satisfaction scores for learning and development providers
- retention of the Charter Plus accreditation
- an increase in the number of partner organisations we have jointly worked with to deliver training or other member events

Equality

Access to training and development will be equitable and based upon individual and Council needs. Member services will make sure that there are no physical, social, religious or cultural barriers to members taking advantage of development opportunities. Members and officers will strive to create a learning environment that focuses on dignity, openness and respect for other's voices.

Appendix A

The principles of the South East Councillor Development Charter Plus are embedded at Bracknell Forest and provide strong foundations for this strategy. Below are the actions required to maintain these core strengths.

What we will do to maintain a clear commitment to member development

- seek commitment to and approval of the strategy and our approach to member development from members and officers
- make planning and delivery of member development the responsibility of members and officers
- support the Member Development Charter Steering Group to oversee member development and monitor the implementation of this strategy
- manage the member development budget effectively
- ensure equality of opportunity and access for all learning and development activities
- provide appropriate training to member services staff

What we will do to foster a strategic approach to member development

- oversee the Member Development Programme and additional briefings and activities with the Member Development Charter Steering Group – to include consultation, communication and monitoring and evaluation
- annually refresh the Member Development Programme based on member need within the strategic context, including corporate risk management
- champion and promote learning and development activities within political groups through representatives on the Member Development Charter Steering Group
- deliver an induction programme to all newly elected members
- provide appropriate training to members dependent upon their roles and responsibilities
- involve external partners in relevant learning and development activities

What we will do to ensure that member learning and development is effective in building capacity

- ensure that members are clear about the outcomes and benefits of learning and development activities for them as individuals and for the council
- develop members' skills and capabilities across a range of areas including personal development, leadership skills, communication skills and ICT competencies
- develop members' knowledge of particular issues or legislation
- develop members' awareness of local and national issues
- develop members' understanding of key issues, for example community development, community cohesion and equalities and diversity
- utilise a range of methods to deliver the Member Development Programme, including approaches which can continue during challenging times or disruption to business as usual
- provide opportunities for members to network with each other, other authorities, other partners and the community
- evaluate the outcomes and benefits of learning and development activities through participants' feedback
- monitor and record attendance at learning and development activities
- report annually to Council as part of the Member Development Annual Report

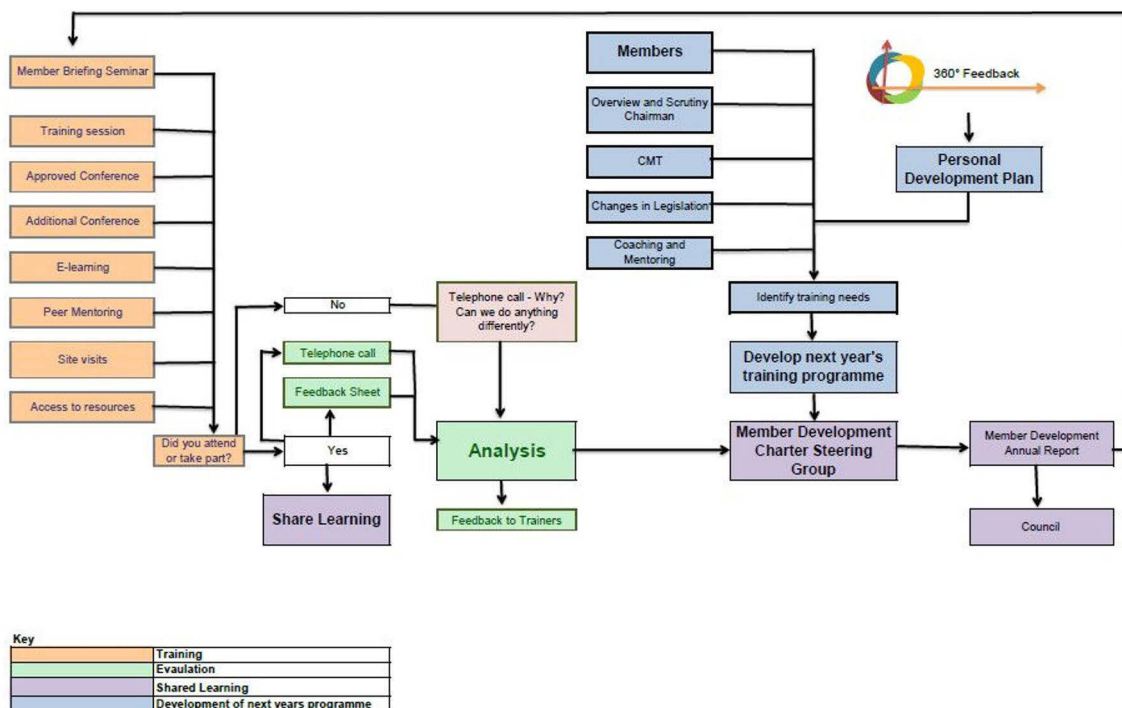
What we will do to support councillors in their various roles

- schedule learning and development activities into the council diary and publicise forthcoming activities
- schedule learning and development at appropriate times and offer multiple sessions where possible
- provide assistance for those with caring responsibilities to attend learning events
- endeavour to meet individual identified development needs in the way that is most appropriate for the member concerned
- make the best use of technology and resources to support members
- actively promote local democracy, the role of councillor and civic life
- promote and improve the work/life balance of members

What we will do to sustain a Member Learning and Development Programme

- develop a varied Member Development Programme covering induction; core knowledge and skills; service specific issues; Council and Committee issues; and individual needs
- support Members in identifying their own learning and development needs, including preparation for or during challenging times or disruption to business as usual
- encourage Members to complete a Personal Development Plan (PDP)
- encourage Members to complete a feedback and reflection process (previously 360 self assessments) at least once each four year Council term
- ask for feedback on the content and quality of each learning session and use it to further develop the programme, according to the learning and development cycle shown below
- provide Members with the opportunity to identify and take into account their own preferred learning style
- ensure that learning and development opportunities, including PDPs link back to the one of the council's six strategic themes

Learning and development cycle



Appendix B

Managing resources

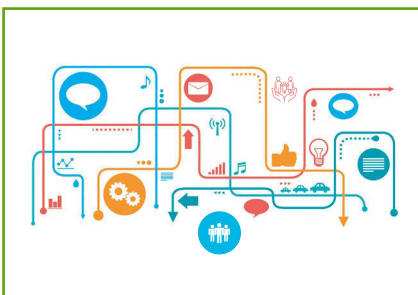
In addition to officer time there is a dedicated budget for member learning and development. The budget delivers a mixture of internally and externally provided sessions and programmes, including any significant projects such as software licences. The Member Development Charter Steering Group agrees the proposed programme against the budget for each year, and reviews the budget spend via the annual report. The budget holder is the Head of Democratic and Registration Services.

The budget covers specific member attendance at agreed conferences. A conference or seminar that is not on the approved list may be funded from the Member Services budget, and attendance will be considered in line with the procedure in the Members' Allowances Scheme. This also applies to any other individual training activity.

Individual members' needs will be considered once the costs of the core work programme have been determined. If there are insufficient funds to meet demand, priority will be given to those training needs identified through the PDP and the feedback and reflection processes.

Parish and Town Councillors will be invited to member briefing seminars when the content is relevant to them. Places on sessions delivered by an external facilitator may be offered to neighbouring authorities and charged at a level to at least fully cover the cost. Parish and Town councillors who are not also Borough councillors will be invited to attend at a subsidised rate.

The Head of Democratic and Registration Services will bid for additional funding for specific initiatives if opportunities arise.



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