

## Member Development and Support Strategy

### 1. Foreword

Telford and Wrekin Council is a fairly young Borough having been created in 1998. This does not, however, mean that we are not ambitious for the future of our borough. To deliver on our ambitions, it is important that all elected members are equipped with the skills and knowledge that they need to carry out their roles and to act as leaders for their communities.

Although our elected members bring with them a diverse range of skills and experience, we are committed to ensuring that each of our elected members receive the support they need to enable them to fulfil their role.

This strategy provides a learning and development framework for members to access the learning that they need as well as setting out the support that officers will provide to members when undertaking their role.

### 2. Introduction

Our elected members play a critical role in supporting their communities and helping the Council to embrace opportunities and deliver its ambitions by understanding the many and complex challenges facing local government. We will endeavour to ensure that our learning and development programme for members enables them to undertake their role in the best way possible to meet the needs of their communities.

In this strategy, 'Member Development' is any activity or training that is intended to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of our elected members both in their individual roles and in their collective roles so as to meet the Council's priorities. Any development or training will be agreed via Members' individual learning plans.

In this strategy, 'Member Support' is any activity undertaken by Council employees that is designed to support members in undertaking their roles within their communities and/or in their roles as Committee Chairs or Cabinet Members.

#### Equality and accessibility for all

Telford and Wrekin Council is committed to the principle of equality for its residents and for elected Members irrespective of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital status. Additionally, the working commitments of Members should not be a barrier to learning and development.

All Members will be given the opportunity to access development activities that will allow them to enhance the skills and knowledge that they need now and into the future. Support will be offered to help Members with their continuous personal development, to enable them to contribute effectively, and respond, to the changing needs of the borough's communities. The Council will take steps to identify and remove any barriers that Members feel prevent them taking advantage of learning opportunities – including physical, social & sensory modalities, religious or cultural barriers. Where possible, the Council will provide

support to Members to enable them to develop skills and knowledge that they might need to prepare for enhanced roles (such as Committee Chair roles or Cabinet roles).

To help remove any barriers to learning and development, we will:-

- Plan formal training sessions in advance so as to try to avoid clashes with any major planned events and the committee cycle;
- Use a variety of delivery methods including face to face training, training using remote means such as MS Teams, workbooks and e-learning;
- Arrange training activities at different times of the day in order to accommodate individual commitments where possible; and
- Explore new technology to facilitate access to learning and development opportunities.

### Objectives

Effective member development is essential in helping Members fulfil their role and will strengthen the process for good decision making. The objectives of this strategy are to help Members develop and strengthen their awareness, knowledge and understanding of:-

- How local government works and the national challenges and opportunities for the Borough;
- Complex issues facing local government with changes to legislation, changing governance structures, a challenging funding environment and the need to have strong links with community partners
- The skills and competencies needed by elected Members in the current climate including effective communications, community leadership and ICT skills

The strategy will also help those who are considering whether or not to stand as a candidate to become an elected member to understand what the role might entail, the 'ideal' skills of an elected member and the support that they can expect to enable them to develop in their role if they are elected.

In terms of Member support, the objectives of this strategy are to set out the support available to Members to enable them to fulfil their community leadership role and undertake their ward work.

In delivering the objectives of this strategy, the Council will:-

- Adopt and support a Member-led approach;
- Take a planned and strategic approach to Member development and support so that there is a clear link to the Council's ambitions;
- Develop and deliver, with Member involvement and commitment, an effective Learning & Development Programme that assists Members to develop their capacity to fulfil their role;
- Support all Members in their development;
- Provide additional support for portfolio holders and chairs of committees;
- Facilitate regular assessment of training needs and work with Members to enable them to reflect on their learning needs;
- Regularly evaluate the learning and development programme, with input from Members'

- Evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy through the Council's performance framework;
- Provide appropriate budget and facilities for training and development;
- Operate an effective Member Development Steering Group; and
- Work with the Local Government Association to enable Members to access opportunities to network with Members from other councils and share examples of good practice.

### **3. Ownership**

The effectiveness of this strategy is dependent upon the commitment of both officers and Members.

Officers will be expected to identify appropriate learning opportunities and support Members to access those opportunities, support Members who choose to do so to review their learning needs on a 2-yearly basis and develop individual learning plans, collate and record Member feedback on training and provide support to the Member Development Steering Group. Members are asked to make a commitment to their own individual learning and development and engage in activities that are offered to them.

The Council has a responsibility to demonstrate compliance with its legal obligations and to provide training to Members that enables them to fulfil their role safe from undue criticism. To help the Council in doing this, Members are encouraged to participate in the training activities that are identified as being essential training, including regular refresher training (such as Equality and Diversity training and Code of Conduct training). Members are asked to provide honest feedback using the feedback mechanisms provided at the end of each activity so that officers can review and evaluate the effectiveness of the learning and development programme.

The role of Group Leaders and Cabinet Members is to promote the opportunities available through the learning and development programme to their respective Members and encourage participation.

### **4. Member support**

#### Staffing arrangements

To assist Members, the information below sets out the arrangements that are in place to provide support:-

#### **Cabinet Members**

Cabinet members are supported by officers within the Cabinet Office. Those officers are:-

- Executive Assistant to the Leader;
- PA to the Deputy Leader, Cabinet and Mayor;
- PA to Cabinet Members; and
- Cabinet Support Officer

These officers are responsible for ensuring that the Leader, Cabinet Members, Mayor and Deputy Mayor are made aware of training opportunities that may be able to further their development, making them aware of conferencing and networking opportunities and providing support to them for things such as Ward newsletters, diary management, case work, managing enquiries and similar.

### **Other Members**

The remaining membership is supported by officers within the Democracy team. Those officers are:-

- Team Leader Democracy
- Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)
- Senior Democracy Officer (Democracy)
- 2 x Democracy Officers (Scrutiny)
- 2 x Democracy Officers (Democracy)
- 2 x Member Support Officers
- 1 x Scrutiny Assistant
- 1 x Apprentice

Each of these officers will act as the named support officer for Members, making arrangements for them to undertake training, undertaking reviews of their learning needs where requested, assisting Members with their case work, managing the member enquiry process, diary management, coordinating Ward newsletters and similar activities.

### Support available

The support available to Members is set out below.

### **Cabinet**

- Managing diaries;
- Coordinating cabinet member enquiries;
- Responding to press enquiries;
- Arranging meetings;
- Attending meetings on behalf of Cabinet members where appropriate;
- Providing ICT support;
- Provision of printed material (non-political) for use in ward work;
- Preparing papers for consideration in advance of meetings;
- Arranging meetings and ward surgeries;
- Note-taking at meetings;
- Undertaking research;
- Responding to residents' queries;
- Providing information for Ward newsletters;
- Undertaking casework;
- Operating the Mayor's social media; and
- Supporting civic events

Officers will support other Members by:-

- Facilitating the provision of literature for use in ward walks;
- Arranging ward surgery room bookings;
- Providing ward surgery signage;
- Providing business cards;
- Providing ICT support – training, setting up of mobile phones/laptops and other equipment;
- Ensuring any enquiries are directed to the most appropriate officer or external organisation;
- Provision of printed materials at Member's request (non-political) subject to an annual maximum limit for use in ward work, to be notified to Members annually;
- Preparing and publishing an annual Ward newsletter (one combined newsletter in multi-Member wards);
- Provide civic support to the events team and the Cabinet office for events that occur throughout the year;
- Managing Member enquiry process ;
- Provide a report to Members on a six-monthly basis regarding issues arising in their ward (identified through Ward walks) [in development];
- Writing speeches as required;
- Providing media support to Committee Chairs; and
- Providing information regarding ward demographics upon election and updated annually [in development]

## **5. Member Development Steering Group**

The Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) is a cross party working group that meets throughout the year to consider matters relating to Member development.

The MDSG has considered, and had input into, this strategy and the individual learning plan process that may be part of the Member training process throughout the year.

The MDSG has expressed an ambition that the Council works towards meeting the requirements of the West Midlands Member Development Charter and the Local Government Association Charter and the MDSG will play an important role in ensuring that the Council meets the standards required for those charters.

## **6. Member Training**

### Process

Learning and Development will normally be aligned with a typical Borough election cycle (next elections due in 2023 and then every 4 years thereafter).

Each Member will be offered an initial learning needs assessment within 6 months of adoption of this strategy or within 6 months of election, whichever is sooner. A review of this learning needs assessment will be offered in year 1 and year 3 of a Member's term. If the offer of a review is taken up, it will be undertaken by the named support officer for each

member before being provided to Group Leaders for comment. Such reviews will be undertaken between September and February in each of the review years and will be based upon the Local Government Association's political skills framework and role descriptions.

Members are encouraged to undertake their learning needs assessment having reviewed the role description relevant to the role that they are undertaking and any role that they will be undertaking within the next 6 months (see **Appendix B**).

An anonymised summary of learning needs will be collated and used to inform a review of the learning and development programme. This review will be undertaken by the MDSG annually in February in preparation for the start of the next municipal year.

A summary of feedback on the training and development programme will also be considered by the MDSG.

### Learning & Development Programme

It is proposed that the Council's Learning and Development Programme will be delivered through 4 main themes:-

**Hit the Ground Running/Refresher Training** – the training provided within this category will enable the Council to demonstrate compliance with its statutory duties. The training will also provide the knowledge, and develop the skills, needed to be an effective member following an election. It will include a number of core sessions which are considered essential for Members to undertake as part of their induction, in order for them to perform their role effectively at a minimum level, as well as a recommended refresher every 4 years. The training includes:-

- Planning/Licensing/Appeals – where a Member is appointed to one of these committees;
- Code of Conduct/Standards;
- Exploitation in the community;
- Corporate parenting;
- Information management;
- Equality and diversity; and
- Keeping yourself and others safe

**Core Skills Training** – this training will enable Members to undertake development that will enable them to fulfil their roles in the best way possible. It will provide training in matters such as community leadership, effective negotiating and influencing skills (including nudge theory), community engagement, supporting your constituents, minority groups in leadership, evaluating reports and framing questions, and know your ward.

**Committee/Council skills** – the training provided under this category will be aimed at those who may have an additional role such as committee member, or committee chair and will include training in Audit, scrutinising the work of the council, emergency

planning/councillors' role in an emergency, outside bodies, health and social care landscape, partnership working, and chairing skills.

**Ad-hoc training** – this will be training identified by officers and Members, informed by the learning needs assessment where one has been carried out and will be subject to appropriate budget. This will be approved following the approval process flow chart set out at **Appendix A**. Members will be asked to cascade their learning to Committee or political groups as appropriate.

Training will be delivered through a varied programme provided by in-house officers, external trainers, LGA resources, West Midlands Employers courses, workbooks, Local Government Information Unit.

An annual report will be provided to full Council on matters relating to Member development – this will include information on training offered, feedback, attendance at training etc.

## **7. Enhanced training for Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Group Leaders**

- Open to a small number of members (10) nominated by the Leader as those with potential to progress to senior roles to cover:- strategic thinking, enhanced nudge theory, how to lead, media skills, getting social media to work for you etc.
- LGA's Leadership Academy (£1,000 for first place and £1,250 for subsequent – residential course over 3 modules (6 days)). Due to budgetary constraints, 2 spaces will be offered to the administration on an annual basis with one course offered to the minority groups in alternate years. In the event that spare budget is available, further spaces may be offered on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Identify opportunities for local and national stage to share experience and learning
- In line with the long-standing custom and practice (first established in 2010), the Council recognises the significant benefit and development of group Leaders to attend their party's annual conference, the council will therefore support Group Leaders' to attend their party's annual conference and their respective LGA conferences. This support includes travel, accommodation and passes to conference but excludes meals and subsistence. This will be funded from the relevant group's training and development budget

## **8. Review of Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of learning and of this Strategy will be reviewed through a variety of methods including:-

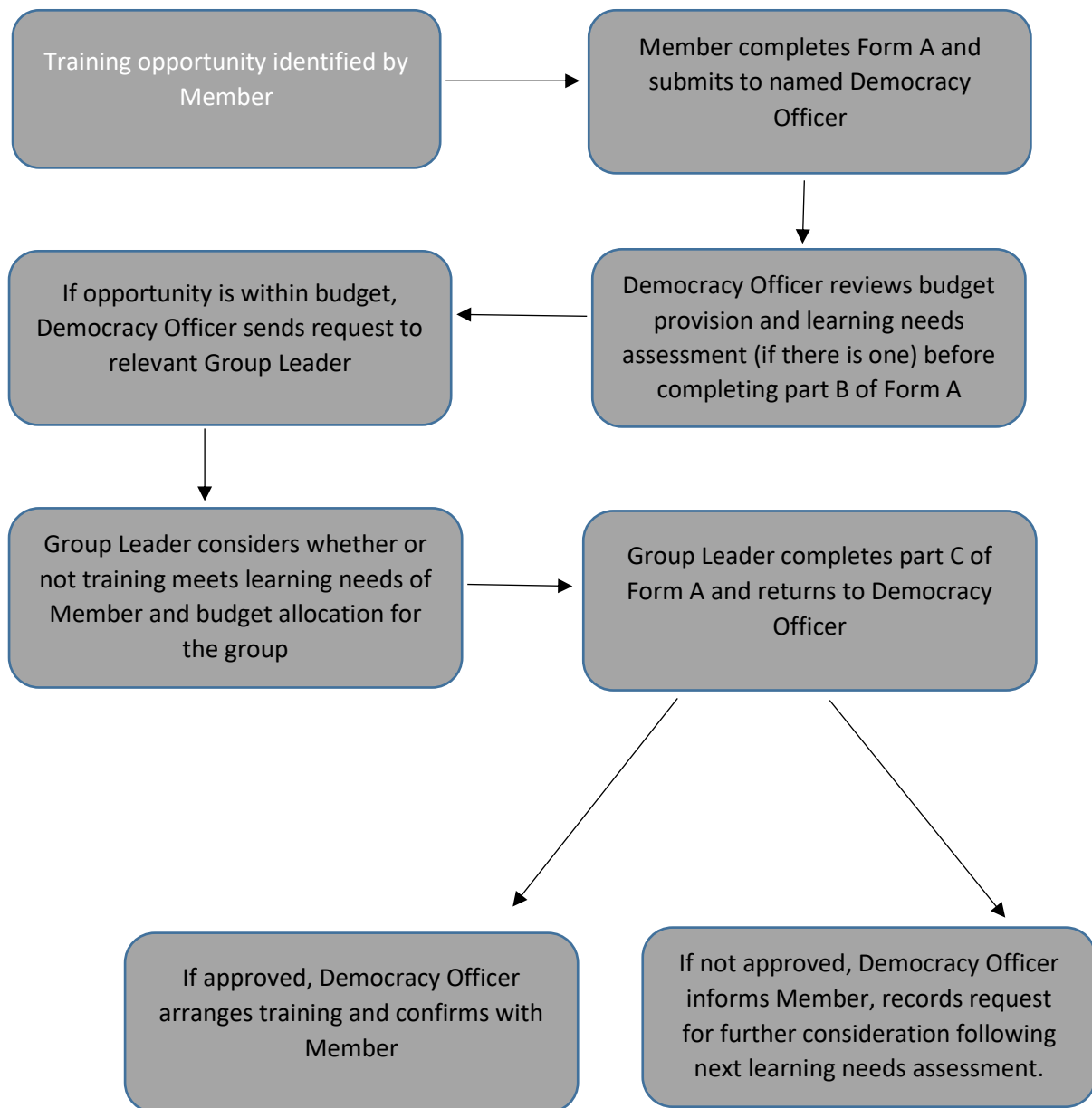
- Pre-attendance questionnaire on expectations/learning needs
- Feedback invited from Members following each session – questionnaire or survey monkey style
- Reviewed twice a year by MDSG - September and February
- Member attendance statistics reviewed and reported to full Council annually

Version control

Date	Version number	Comments
21.02.2021	v.1.0	First draft
16.06.2021	v.1.1	Second draft
29.06.2021	v.1.2	Third draft
14.07.2021	v.1.3	Final draft

## APPENDIX A

### Ad-hoc training approval process





**FORM A – PART A**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Role:</b>
<b>Course title:</b> (include link if possible)	
<b>Course provider:</b> <b>Course Location:</b>  <b>Course date:</b>	
<b>Date of learning needs assessment (if one has been undertaken):</b> <b>Learning needs identified:</b>	
<b>Links to following Council priorities (where relevant):</b>	

**PART B**

<b>Democracy Officer name:</b>
<b>Course cost (incl. travel and accommodation): £</b>
<b>Budget available: £</b>
<b>Course addresses learning needs: Yes / No</b>

**PART C**

<b>I do / do not approve the request</b> (delete as appropriate)	
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

## **APPENDIX B Role Descriptions**