



WE ARE EAST SUFFOLK

Member Development Strategy 2019-23

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Table of Contents

Section	Page
Table of contents	2
Foreword and Commitment	3
Context	4
Vision and Values	4
Aims	5
Overall Management and Monitoring of the Strategy	5
Member Development Steering Group	6
How Member Development needs will be identified	7
How Member Development needs will be met	9
Support for Prospective and New Councillors	9
Resources	10
Ongoing Commitment	11
Impact of COVID-19	11
Appendix A – Councillor Communications Guidelines	13
Appendix B – Member Support Scheme	14
Appendix C – Member Development Strategy Action Plan	15

Foreword and Commitment

Members of the newly formed East Suffolk Council wish to serve the communities they were elected to represent, and the District as a whole, to the best of their ability.

The Council wishes to ensure that all Members, including any Co-opted Members, have the necessary skills and knowledge to best serve their community. This is very important, at a time of ongoing changes in local government, as we support our communities in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council has set out its aims and objectives in the new East Suffolk Strategic Plan which was agreed in February 2020. There are five Themes in the Strategic Plan, which are Growing our Economy, Enabling our Communities, Remaining Financially Sustainable, Delivering Digital Transformation, and Caring for our Environment. Councillors play a key role in developing and delivering these Themes, for the benefit of the Council and its communities.

To achieve this, it is a great benefit to have Councillors and Co-opted Members from a range of different backgrounds. They bring with them a wealth of different experiences. It also means that they have different training needs and learning styles. The Member Development Strategy (the Strategy) recognises this. It sets out clearly how the Council will support Members in obtaining the knowledge and skills that they require, whilst also recognising that Councillors and Co-opted Members need to take responsibility for their own learning and development.

The Strategy has been reviewed and updated by an East Suffolk Member Development Steering Group (MDSG), which includes the Group Leaders from all the political groups represented on the Council. The MDSG's main role is to champion Member Development and to ensure that learning and development meets the needs of Councillors and Co-opted Members.

The Strategy covers the period up to May 2023. It includes activities to support those who have been councillors, previously, those who were newly elected in May 2019, and those who might be thinking of standing for election.

The Strategy is divided into a number of sections that explain the vision, values and aims; how they will be achieved and monitored; how learning and development needs will be identified and met; what support and resources are available, and what the role of the MDSG is. Also, how the success of Member Development will be measured and assessed, together with an Action Plan, setting out specific targets required to deliver the Strategy.

Councillors are faced with a wide range of roles and responsibilities. These cannot be underestimated. With its consistent and structured approach to Member Development, the Strategy represents a major commitment by the Council to support its Members. If Councillors have this support, it helps them to carry out their roles, effectively and efficiently. This, in turn, helps to promote efficient decision making, strong representation and good governance.

Stephen Baker
Chief Executive

Councillor Steve Gallant
Leader of East Suffolk Council

Councillor Peter Byatt
Labour Group Leader

Councillor Graham Elliott
GLI Group Leader

Context

Many people who are elected as Members have their own political views and core social values. Those in political groups will receive leadership and support from their own group.

The Strategy outlines the support that will be given to Councillors and any Co-opted Members to help them fulfil their roles and contribute to the delivery of the Council's strategic Themes. The Strategy ensures that a long-term view is taken of Member Development but is also one which can flex to fit changing needs and priorities.

The Strategy recognises that Councillors are not employees of the Council and strives to help them seek a balance between their demanding roles, both inside, and outside, of the Council.

Vision and Values

The vision for the Strategy is that all Councillors, and any Co-opted Members, have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform effectively and efficiently in their current roles, and to be able to develop those skills/knowledge for future roles in the Council.

To help achieve this vision, the key values that underpin the Strategy are:

- Development opportunities will be available to all Councillors and Co-opted Members irrespective of political allegiance.
- Member development will be based on the identified and agreed needs of the individual Councillor or Co-opted Member through their participation in the Member Development Plan (MDP) process.
- Member development will be delivered through methods, at locations, and at times, that ensure equality of access for Councillors or Co-opted Members' personal circumstances, backgrounds and learning styles.
- The Council has a learning culture that sees continuous development and life-long learning for Councillors and Co-opted Members as vital to its success.
- The Council acknowledges that Councillors and any Co-opted Members may have transferable skills from their work place and/or life experiences that can be used to help them perform their Council role.

Aims

The Strategy has the following aims:

1. To create a clear framework for the development of Councillors and Co-opted Members based on their individual needs and the needs of the Council as a whole.
2. To ensure that all Councillors and Co-opted Members have the skills at a level that is suitable for their roles and responsibilities.
3. To ensure Councillors have the skills and knowledge necessary to oversee the delivery of high quality public services by the Council through their community leadership.
4. To ensure that Councillors and Co-opted Members feel confident and motivated to undertake their roles.
5. To ensure that Councillors and Co-opted Members are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, legal requirements and matters of good practice as a means of delivering good governance.
6. To support the continued development of Councillors and Co-opted Members and help prepare them for roles that they may fulfil in the future.
7. To ensure a consistency of approach to Member development.
8. To attract and retain high calibre Councillors from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible.

Overall Management and Monitoring of the Strategy

Member development must be undertaken and managed if the Strategy is to be successful. To do this, it is vital that Councillors play an integral part in the management of the development programme.

The MDSG will advise the Council on all Member Development matters and will evaluate the programme of Member Development to ensure that it is responsive to Members' needs as follows:

- At least once a year, the MDSG will evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of this Strategy. If necessary, it will be updated to take account of lessons learned, Member feedback, latest developments and best practice.
- Where possible, Members will be asked to complete evaluation forms after each training session in the core programme either via a paper form at the session or electronically afterwards. Members attending externally provided courses will be encouraged to provide feedback to the Council on them to ensure that value for money is obtained.

- Member Development Plan (MDP) meetings will be offered to all new Councillors within 6 months of their election with a review taking place annually afterwards or earlier, on request. The review meeting will include an opportunity for Members to comment on the training provided since their initial review and to assess the impact training has had on their ability and capacity to carry out their role, and any ongoing benefits.
- During the period covered by the Strategy, at least one comprehensive survey of Members will be undertaken to investigate a range of issues relating to their needs and their views of the services provided for them.
- Where appropriate, exit interviews will be undertaken with Members who have resigned or who are not seeking re-election to determine whether Member Development opportunities contributed to their decision.

Evaluation and feedback will be analysed and will inform the provision of Member training and will shape future policies. Each year, the MDSG will review the feedback that is received in respect of Member Development and share this information with other Councillors, and if necessary, with Cabinet. Significant issues will be brought to the attention of the MDSG at other times, if required.

Member Development Steering Group

The Strategy is owned by the Council as a whole. However, it will be the responsibility of the MDSG and the Democratic Services team to ensure that the Strategy is reviewed and updated to reflect any changes arising from external and internal factors, and that it continues to be fit for purpose.

Role and Composition

The MDSG will include representatives from all the political groups that make up the Full Council, with officer support being provided by a Democratic Services Officer.

The Group will meet a minimum of 4 times a year to agree and review training and development for Councillors and any Co-opted Members.

The main purpose of the MDSG is to:

- Provide strong leadership and guidance in respect of Member Development.
- Develop a comprehensive Member Development Programme.
- Ensure that learning and development is effective in building capacity and ensuring that Councillors have the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their community leadership roles effectively.

Terms of Reference

- To champion and encourage Member development.
- To monitor and review the Strategy and associated documents/processes on an at least an annual basis.
- To shape and prioritise Member Development, e.g. New Member induction Programme, Prospective Councillor Events, training and development needs identified through MDP or other means etc.
- To oversee the development of a comprehensive Member Development Programme, that takes advantage of partnership opportunities with other local authorities and promotes best practice for the delivery of Member Development.
- To ensure that the Council provides Member Development that complies with the principles of the Charter and / or Charter Plus for Member Development.
- To encourage effective Member / officer working relationships in accordance with the Code of Conduct and to ensure that all Councillor roles are explained clearly.
- To assist in the development of effective evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of the Member Development Programme and to make best use of resources.
- To maintain a dialogue with national and regional bodies supporting Member Development and to explore external sources of funding for Member Development.
- To receive regular update reports on Member Development within the Council, to review Member attendance at Member Development events and to retain an overview of the Member Development budget.
- To ensure equal access for all Councillors to training and development and to promote the use of information technology for and by Members.

How Member Development Needs will be Identified

Member development needs will be identified through the following four main avenues:

1. Corporate Training Needs

The environment in which local government operates may change frequently and fundamentally. This is because of changes in the law, corporate priorities, or changes to local government services/structures. The Council must be alert to these changes and be ready to adapt its learning and development to suit every circumstance, and to fill any gaps in skills and knowledge that arise.

2. Role of Members

It is vital that Member Development and this Strategy relate directly to the roles and duties that Members have to fulfil. To ensure this, the Council has developed a number of Role Descriptions for Councillors which are included in the Council's Constitution. The MDSG will ensure that there is a programme of development that enables Councillors and Co-opted Members to have the skills and knowledge to fulfil the specific roles identified. Each newly elected Councillor or Co-opted Member will be invited to participate in an induction programme relevant to their role.

3. Specialist Role Needs

Many Members will have additional roles that they currently carry out, or roles that they aspire to, in the future, and these will require specialist or more focused training. These roles include:

- Chairman or Vice-Chairman of Committees or Sub-Committees
- Leadership, for example Leader of the Council or Leader of a Political Group
- Cabinet Member or Shadow Portfolio Holders
- Regulatory Committees such as Licensing and Planning which exercise quasi-judicial functions
- Scrutiny
- Audit and Governance
- Civic and ceremonial protocols

4. Identifying Personal Development Needs

The skills needed to carry out the roles listed in 1 – 3 above set the training needs for Councillors, which are also linked to the delivery of Themes in the Strategic Plan. However, for a truly effective training needs analysis which identifies specific development needs for individual Members, a more in-depth discussion is needed on a one-to-one basis. This can best be achieved through participation in the MDP process. This involves:

- Participation in an individual Member Development Plan meeting where Councillors can identify any gaps in their skills / knowledge to inform their development needs.
- Considering other relevant, necessary skills eg presentational skills, speed reading, public speaking etc.
- Discussions with Political Group Leaders or the Democratic Services Team.
- Reviewing the impact of learning and development through the MDP process as well as feedback received through course evaluation.
- Councillors maintaining their own personal development / training records and regularly reviewing if there any gaps in their skills / knowledge.

Based on the above, an overall Member Development Programme will be developed each year but will be reviewed by the MDSG on a regular basis to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of Members and the Council.

How Member Development Needs will be Met

To support the diverse development needs of Councillors and Co-opted Members, a range of options will be made available to suit different learning styles and individual circumstances. In some cases, these can be delivered through the Council's own internal resources or, where necessary, specialist providers with a proven track records in terms of training will be brought in. Potential development delivery methods may include:

- Training courses
- Informal in-house briefings and workshops, including joint Member / officer training where appropriate
- External conferences and seminars
- Member briefings
- Written learning materials
- Peer Mentors
- E-Learning packages
- Distance learning packages
- Visits to other Councils or relevant partners
- Shadowing opportunities
- Sharing of knowledge amongst other Elected Members
- Personal research or preparation for specific projects.

Councillors will be encouraged to be involved in Member Development, where appropriate, by leading workshops, disseminating expert knowledge, offering mentoring or by encouraging the take-up of Member Development opportunities. The delivery of these activities will also be considered as contributing towards a Member's own continued professional development and can be a method of achieving goals identified on their specific Member Development Plan.

Support for Prospective and New Councillors

East Suffolk Council is keen to attract Members from all different backgrounds to join the Council, including those people who are not necessarily part of established political groups. Such people might require some additional information, and support, on what it is like to be a Councillor, such as details of the potential time commitments, the benefits of being a Councillor, as well as some of the challenges.

The following specific support will be offered to prospective Councillors:

- A media campaign to attract and support prospective Councillors will commence at least 6 months before the elections and drop-in sessions will be available with Elections and Democratic Services staff, to provide information on being a councillor.
- A candidate pack will give information on the process for standing for election and the required forms to be completed, as well as brief details on what it means to be an East Suffolk Councillor.
- Candidates will be encouraged to observe Council and Committee meetings to further their understanding of how the Council operates.

The following specific support will be offered to New Councillors:

- After the elections, each new Councillor will be provided with an Induction Guide providing a more detailed introduction to the Council and practical information about being a Councillor.
- A comprehensive Induction Programme will be provided to ensure that newly-elected Councillors can quickly participate fully in the business of the Council. This will include an opportunity to meet senior officers, find out about the Council's key priorities, be given information to get them started and receive basic training on key areas such as the Code of Conduct.
- Details of the Democratic Services Team will be given to provide support with information and signposting.
- Newly-elected Councillors will receive a tour of the Council offices at Lowestoft and Melton so they can familiarise themselves with the key locations and health and safety procedures for each building.
- Councillors who have been elected at by-elections will be provided with a similar Induction Programme and support.
- New Councillors will be offered a tour of key locations across the District.
- New Councillors will also be offered a Member Development Plan meeting within 6 months of being elected to identify any specific training needs.

In addition, Councillor Communication Guidelines (Appendix A) have been developed so that new Members understand the minimum level of service that residents can reasonably expect when contacting their District Councillor.

The Member Support Scheme (Appendix B) provides for a Democratic Services Officer to be assigned to a newly elected Member immediately following the election. Members can also request peer support and/or mentoring by a more experienced Member which is particularly helpful for newly-elected colleagues as well as those Councillors stepping into key roles. This provides development benefits for both the mentor and the mentee.

Resources

Each year, the MDSG will identify the budget and resources that are needed to support Member Development and will refer any recommendations for the Member Development budget to Full Council (as part of the annual budget review process). These resources will be monitored by the MDSG and include:

- Financial budget allocation and other capacity to support Member Development activities
- Member support from within the Democratic Services Team
- Conference / Seminar attendance by specific postholders eg Cabinet Members, Group Leaders, Chairmen of Committees etc
- Opportunities for cross-authority / partner training on a countywide, regional or national basis

- Specific training programmes provided by national / regional course providers eg Local Government Association, South East Employers etc.
- Relevant opportunities for learning through seminars, conferences or visits hosted by partners.

The budget for Member Development is currently set at £50,000 and has been profiled over a four year period to align with District Council Elections (£20,000 in the first year and £10,000 per year thereafter). This allows the Council to make best use of resources and accommodate development needs immediately prior to and after all-out Elections.

Ongoing Commitment

The formation of East Suffolk Council gave Elected Members the opportunity to review their commitment towards Member Development generally as well as reviewing and updating the Member Development Strategy and Programme to ensure it was fit for purpose.

The new Council adopted “Charter Plus” status for Member Development at its first Council meeting on 22 May 2019 and aims to achieve “Charter Plus” Status in its own right in 2020.

As part of their ongoing commitment, the MDSG has developed an Action Plan setting out specific pieces of work required to deliver the Member Development Strategy (Appendix D) which will support the direction and priorities within the East Suffolk Strategic Plan.

The Strategy and the Action Plan are flexible and dynamic, ensuring that the right support can be offered to Members, depending on what the changes in priorities might be, arising from national or local circumstances. A good demonstration of this, is the way in which Member Development priorities have changed, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has had a major impact on the way in which people live and work. It has impacted on Councillors, too, in terms how they conduct their roles, and carry out their duties, whilst also dealing with whatever the impact of COVID might be on their personal lives.

With the lockdown, face to face meetings were cancelled and access to the Council Offices was removed. The Council began to hold meetings remotely, by Zoom. This has been a major change and something which both Members and Officers have had to adjust to very quickly, with the provision of support and training.

The training programme was adapted to include sessions not only on the functionality of Zoom, but also about the etiquette and protocol of holding remote meetings. Also, before the first remote meeting of each Committee/Cabinet, there was a run through with all of the Members and Officers who would be in attendance, to rehearse the agenda, and how items of business would be dealt with. This was to ensure that East Suffolk’s virtual meetings were as professionally run as those held in the conference room.

It has also been recognised that, whilst Members may be shielding themselves, they are continuing to work from home, participating in formal meetings, carrying out their casework with constituents, and liaising with Town and Parish Councils.

To support Members further, a survey has been carried out to understand the impact that COVID-19 is having on Councillors. The survey asks about the Members' experiences of working remotely, from a personal perspective, from a practical perspective, and to find out if they are experiencing any issues in fulfilling their roles at this time, and if so, whether they require any assistance.

As part of this survey, Members have been reminded that they can carry out a home Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment to see if there are any particular issues which Democratic Services can then discuss with them.

Members have also been asked to complete an ICT survey to ensure that they have the necessary equipment to be able to work from home efficiently.

Meanwhile, the Member Development budget has been safeguarded and will be reviewed to ensure that if there are any training needs identified as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, and working from home, such as around presentational skills, better use of Outlook, increased IT skills etc, these can be accommodated.



COUNCILLOR COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

East Suffolk Council is committed to delivering quality services. These Communication Guidelines outline the minimum level of service that members of the public can reasonably expect when contacting their District Councillor.

We will:

- Respect your views and respond to you in a fair, objective, polite and helpful manner
- Respond as quickly as possible to all requests for information or services
- Respect your right to privacy and confidentiality
- Actively seek your views and feedback, acting on them appropriately
- Apologise if we get it wrong and put it right as quickly as possible

If you visit us:

- If you have made an appointment we will ensure that you are seen at the time agreed, or keep you informed of any delay and the reasons for this

If you telephone us:

- We will answer or respond to your call as soon as possible

If you email or write to us:

- We aim to respond to letters within 14 days and emails within 7 days. If this is not possible, we will acknowledge your correspondence telling you why and we will give you a response date
- We will respond to you in plain language

What we expect from you:

- Openness and honesty, giving as much information as possible to assist us in dealing with your enquiry, letting us know if you have any special needs
- Full co-operation and for you to be respectful when dealing with Councillors, as although we will do our best to help you, we will not tolerate abuse, threats or harassment, on or off Council premises.

MEMBER SUPPORT SCHEME

The Member Support Scheme provides Councillors with a named contact from Democratic Services following their election. In addition, if requested, a peer Mentor who is usually a Councillor from their own political group, can be assigned to help with signposting and providing advice on all issues affecting the life of a Councillor.

The Scheme is not designed to replace the direct contact and access that all Councillors can expect when they wish to speak to their Group Leaders, the Chief Executive, Directors or Heads of Services. It is also not intended that it will create personal assistants or research assistants for individual Councillors as this work is undertaken by Political Group Assistants.

Democratic Services and Mentors can offer support and advice, especially during the first year after a Member is elected or if they have been appointed to a new role, and can help the Councillor understand the requirements of the role and develop their confidence. The Member Support Scheme should enable Councillors to:

- be more aware of where to go for information and support
- feel more confident in their representative and decision-making roles
- be able to make an early contribution to the work of the Council and representing their local community.

If Members need factual information about Council services and details about who to contact within the Council, or any other day to day information about Council business, contact can be made with their named Democratic Services Officer or anyone within the Democratic Services Team.

What can a Councillor expect from their named Democratic Services Officer or a Mentor?

- A friendly response to questions however trivial they may appear
- Support and advice from the Officer/Mentor's personal knowledge and experience
- Signposting to an appropriate officer or Councillor to take forward a query as needed – this will usually be at service head or team leader level for any new service enquiry or it could be a Cabinet Member
- A sounding board to help the Councillor reflect on new experiences and issues raised
- A response to emails and telephone calls as promptly as possible and to be advised who will respond to queries if the Democratic Services Officer/Mentor is away for an extended period of time
- A prompt response to requests to meet with the Democratic Services Officer/Mentor

How and when is a named Democratic Services Officer or Peer Mentor assigned?

The named Democratic Services Officer will be appointed immediately following the election and will contact the new Councillor within the first day or so after the Count. Once notified of a request for a Peer Mentor, the Democratic Services Officer will contact Political Group Leaders to ask for a nomination as soon as practicable.

The Member Support Scheme is informal and intended to be helpful, therefore, Councillors can make as much or as little use of it as they wish.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Strategic Plan Theme	Actions	Date Completed by the end of
Growing Our Economy		
Let’s build a strong sustainable economy for our future; we want our district to achieve its maximum potential, for the good of everyone in the area.	To provide Members with a baseline of information to ensure they fully understand this theme within the Strategic Plan, the position the authority is currently in against the theme and where to get further information on any of the objectives within the plan.	October 2020
Enabling Our Communities		
Working together, we will enable our communities to identify opportunities and challenges, we will empower them to make a difference; we will support our communities to enhance the places we live and work for the well-being of all.	<p>To provide Members with a baseline of information to ensure they fully understand this theme within the Strategic Plan, the position the authority is currently in against the theme and where to get further information on any of the objectives within the plan.</p> <p>To provide the core members of each Community Partnership with the knowledge and skills they need to ensure that they can fully support their communities.</p>	<p>December 2020</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Remaining Financially Sustainable		
We will grow and prosper as a council; we will ensure we are well-run; provide value for money and strive for excellence.	<p>To provide Members with a baseline of information to ensure they fully understand this theme within the Strategic Plan, the position the authority is currently in against the theme and where to get further information on any of the objectives within the plan.</p> <p>To ensure that all Members understand Budget Setting and the impact of decisions on the Council’s overall finances</p>	<p>February 2021</p> <p>February 2021</p>

Delivering Digital Transformation		
Digital technology can transform the way we work and live; we will use technology to make services efficient and easily accessible to all and assist our communities to embrace and access new technologies.	To provide Members with a baseline of information to ensure they fully understand this theme within the Strategic Plan, the position the authority is currently in against the theme and where to get further information on any of the objectives within the plan. To ensure that individual Members are digitally competent and aware particularly in relation to remote working. Report to MDSG exploring options for expanding electronic and virtual learning opportunities to provide a blended learning package for Members	July 2020 December 2020 March 2021
Caring for our Environment		
We know you are concerned about our environment; we are too, so we will put the environment at the heart of everything we do.	To provide Members with a baseline of information to ensure they fully understand this theme within the Strategic Plan, the position the authority is currently in against the theme and where to get further information on any of the objectives within the plan.	August 2020

General	Actions	Date Completed by the end of
Seek reaccreditation for Charter Plus Status in 2020	Prepare submission in support of reaccreditation	August 2020
Support newly elected Councillors	Review the format and content of the Councillor Handbook/Guide Review the format and content of the Induction Programme Provide appropriate Induction arrangements in the event of a by-election	April 2023 April 2023 As and when required
Deliver Member Development Plan (MDP) Programme	To offer Councillors a review of their MDP Review MDP process	March Annually May 2021

Deliver Member Development Training Programme	Review of training needs identified through MDPs and any training to assist with the delivery of corporate priorities	April Annually
	To review the training provided via feedback forms, including any suggestions for additional training	April Annually
	To create a training Programme based on the above for the following year, including sourcing any necessary external training providers	May Annually
	To undertake a Councillor Satisfaction Survey of Member support and engagement including communications	August 2021
Deliver a Leadership Management Programme	Source an external training provider for a comprehensive Leadership Management Programme in conjunction with neighbouring Authorities	December 2021
Undertake review of the implementation and effectiveness of the Strategy	To review the training activities and expenditure in the previous year and the priorities and budgets for the year ahead	March annually
	To review the Member Development Strategy	May 2021
Attract and support a diverse range of individuals thinking of becoming a Councillor	To raise the profile of the role and duties of a Councillor through community and business events/contacts	April 2023
	To review the candidate Information Pack including information about the Council, its political and officer structure and the role of a Councillor	August 2022
	Hold prospective Be a Councillor events	February 2023