

General Purposes Committee

08 October 2025

Part 1 - Public

Delegated



Cabinet Member	n/a
Responsible Officer	Adrian Stanfield, Director Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive
Report Author	Mathew Brooks, Head of HR & Development

Member Development Strategy – Initial Themes and Next Steps

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report outlines the initial themes identified for inclusion in the Council's Member Development Strategy.
- 1.2 These themes have emerged from early discussions between Cllr Mark Rhodes and Cllr Alex McDermott (as Chair/ Vice-Chair of General Purposes Committee), Adrian Stanfield, Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive and Mathew Brooks, Head of HR & Development.
- 1.3 The Member Development Strategy will be shaped through Member engagement, including a proposed survey of all Members. A draft strategy will then be prepared for Member approval.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 A Member Development Strategy will ensure the Council's Members are well-informed, confident in their decision-making roles, and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the effective governance and delivery of council services.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are asked to:
 - Note the emerging themes for the Member Development Strategy;
 - Endorse the proposal to survey all Members on their development needs; and

- Agree that the General Purposes Committee will receive a draft strategy in January 2026.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 The development of a comprehensive Member Development Strategy is a stated priority within the Council's Annual Service Delivery Plan for 2025/26, reflecting the importance of equipping Members with the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their roles effectively.
- 4.2 Following the 2023 elections, an intensive Member induction programme was delivered. Further subject specific training has taken place since that time. Building on this, the Council is now seeking to develop a more structured and responsive Member Development Strategy to support Members in their roles and responsibilities.
- 4.3 Initial discussions have highlighted the need for a strategy that is:
- Member-led and responsive to both individual and collective development needs
 - Flexible in delivery to accommodate time constraints and existing pressures on Members
 - Focused on both foundational knowledge and emerging priorities.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 The following areas have been identified as potential priorities for Member training and development:
- 5.2 **Committee specific training**
- 5.3 Committee specific training aims to equip Members with the knowledge and confidence required to fulfil their distinct responsibilities within each committee.
- 5.4 Through tailored refresher sessions and flexible "bitesize" learning opportunities, Members will deepen their understanding of committee purpose, decision-making processes, and their individual roles. This training will therefore build upon the sessions provided during the induction process in 2023.
- 5.5 This approach ensures that training is targeted, practical, and aligned with the evolving needs of each committee, supporting effective governance and informed participation.
- Refresher sessions for each committee on its purpose, decision-making responsibilities, and Member roles.

- Option for “bitesize” training (e.g., 30-minute sessions before committee meetings).
- Potential for up to two sessions per month to balance existing commitments.

5.6 **Legislative training**

5.7 Legislative training is designed to ensure all Members are equipped with a thorough understanding of the statutory frameworks and essential governance principles underpinning their duties.

5.8 This includes both ongoing mandatory training for key regulatory committees and preparation for anticipated legislative changes which may introduce new or heightened training standards.

5.9 By embedding a strong foundation in legislative requirements and good governance, Members will be able to fulfil their responsibilities with confidence, integrity, and effectiveness.

5.10 A focus on developing knowledge in the following areas could be considered:

- Continued mandatory training for Licensing and Planning Committees.
- Anticipated legislative changes requiring minimum training standards for Planning Committee Members.
- Chairing Effective Meetings (for Chairs, Vice Chairs, and aspiring leaders).
- Role and function of Scrutiny and the Scrutiny Committee.
- Understanding the Audit Function and the role of the Audit Committee.
- Code of Conduct and ethical standards.

5.11 **High-profile and high-risk service areas**

5.12 Focusing on these areas is essential because they represent some of the most complex, high-impact functions within the Council, where decisions can have far-reaching consequences for residents and the organisation alike.

5.13 Equipping Members with specialist knowledge in these areas ensures that governance is not only robust, but also responsive to emerging challenges and scrutiny.

5.14 In-depth understanding empowers Members to ask the right questions, evaluate risks, and contribute meaningfully to discussions and decisions, ultimately enhancing accountability, transparency, and public trust.

5.15 Training to improve Member understanding of:

- Housing services and the Council's role
- Waste services and the waste contract
- Property function and its strategic importance
- Contracts and procurement, including high-value contracts.

5.16 **Finance and Governance**

5.17 A strong grasp of finance and governance is critical for every Member, as these underpin the effective operation and stewardship of the Council.

5.18 Sound financial management enables the Council to allocate resources wisely, deliver quality services, and maintain fiscal resilience in the face of changing demands or economic uncertainty.

5.19 Equipping all Members with this core knowledge not only upholds transparency and legal compliance but also ensures that decisions are made with a full appreciation of their financial implications. In turn, this helps safeguard the Council's reputation and strengthens public confidence in its leadership.

5.20 A focus on developing knowledge in the following areas could be considered:

- Understanding the Statement of Accounts
- Internal and external audit processes
- What constitutes a balanced budget
- Regular updates on financial governance.

5.21 **Continuation of compliance training**

5.22 Ongoing compliance training — including areas such as Equality & Diversity, Safeguarding, PREVENT, Data Protection, and Cyber Security will ensure Members are aware of legal obligations and can protect the wellbeing of the community.

5.23 Staying informed about local government reorganisation and climate change supports responsive and strategic decision-making.

- Equality & Diversity
- Safeguarding Children and Adults
- PREVENT

- Data protection
- Cyber security
- Local Government Reorganisation
- Climate Change
- Corporate Health & Safety

5.24 Access to external resources

5.25 Engaging with external resources and training opportunities, such as those offered by the Local Government Association (LGA), allows Members to continually build their expertise and adapt to new challenges.

5.26 Review of Member engagement with Local Government Association (LGA) online training.

5.27 Consideration of how access to external training can be improved

6 Further options and next steps

6.1 The areas outlined above in section 5 serve as a starting point; Members themselves are central in identifying further development needs and shaping the future focus of training, ensuring the strategy evolves in line with their priorities.

6.2 To ensure the strategy reflects Member priorities, the following actions are proposed:

- Circulation of a short survey to all Members to identify training needs and preferences.
- Inclusion of a question on whether Members would value a Personal Development Plan.
- Development of a draft Member Development Strategy for consideration by the General Purposes Committee in January 2026.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

7.1 Where the council has in-house skills and capability to deliver training and development sessions, these will be delivered within existing resources. Additional provision through a designated budget may need to be agreed where external providers are required. This will be considered alongside the drafting of the development strategy.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 There is a risk that insufficient participation in consultation or training activities could limit the strategy's effectiveness. To mitigate this, it will be important to ensure that the strategy emphasises flexible delivery and ongoing communication to encourage involvement.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. However, the implementation of a member development strategy will ensure members are trained on the legal obligations placed upon them in undertaking their role and discharging the functions of the Council.

10 Consultation and Communications

- 10.1 All Members will be invited to contribute their views and identify their development needs through a proposed all-Member survey.

11 Implementation

- 11.1 Based on feedback received from Members, a draft proposed Member Development Strategy will be presented to Members of the General Purposes Committee at its meeting in January 2026.
- 11.2 Training and development activities will be scheduled to accommodate Members' commitments, with a blend of in-person and online options. Progress will be monitored through regular feedback and evaluation, enabling continuous improvement and adaptation to emerging needs.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

- 12.1.1 Adaptation and resilience have not been considered.

- 12.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.2 Equalities and Diversity

- 12.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Background Papers	None
Annexes	None