

Cabinet Member	Not Applicable
Responsible Officer	Adrian Stanfield, Director of Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive
Report Author	Mathew Brooks, Head of HR & Development

Member Development Strategy 2026 - 2028

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

1.1 The aim of implementing a new Member Development Strategy is to set out how Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council will support and develop its Members to ensure the successful delivery of its strategic priorities.

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 Approve the draft of the new Member Development Strategy 2026-2028 set out at Annex 1.

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 The General Purposes Committee agreed at its meeting in October 2025 that the Strategy:

- Should be Member-led and responsive to both individual and collective development needs.
- Should be flexible in delivery to accommodate time constraints and existing pressures on Members.
- Should be focused on both foundational knowledge and emerging priorities.

4.3 The Committee also agreed that a Member survey should take place, seeking Members' views on the content of the Member Development Strategy. A survey was sent to all Members in December 2025.

5 **Proposal**

5.1 Following the results of the Member Development survey, which received 25 responses, a draft Member Development Strategy has been produced (Annex 1).

5.2 The survey indicated that the vast majority of Members (96% of respondents) feel confident or very confident in their roles.

5.3 The findings of the survey also highlight the importance of adopting a flexible approach to the delivery of Learning & Development activities. Members expressed no overall preference for a single approach in respect of the format of training, with support for training to be delivered in a variety of formats e.g. bitesize sessions in person (28% of respondents), online learning (33%), and dedicated training sessions both in the evening (26%) and during the day (6%).

5.4 This flexibility will help accommodate Members' differing schedules, learning preferences, and commitments, ensuring that all Members have the opportunity to participate and benefit fully from these activities.

5.5 Based on the feedback received through the Member Development survey, the following priority areas have been identified to guide the Member Development Strategy and ensure it aligns with Members' expressed needs and preferences.

5.6 The overarching aim of the Member Development Strategy is focused on five key priority areas.

1. Legislative and Governance

Ensuring Members have the knowledge and skills to uphold statutory responsibilities, lead effective meetings, and maintain ethical standards.

2. Specialist / Council-Specific Training

Building expertise in critical service areas such as housing, waste management, property strategy, and procurement to support informed decision-making.

3. Finance and Governance

Enhancing financial literacy and resilience through training on budget management, audit processes, risk management, and medium-term financial planning.

4. Compliance Training

Regular updates to Compliance training will ensure Members are aware of legal obligations and can protect the wellbeing of the community.

5. Local Government Reorganisation

Preparing the Council for structural changes by equipping Members with the skills to manage transition, understand new governance frameworks, and communicate effectively with residents.

5.7 Together, these priorities should help ensure that Members are well-equipped to fulfil their roles effectively, adapt to future challenges, and continue to serve the Council and community to the highest standard.

6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

6.1 Where the council has in-house skills and capability to deliver learning and development sessions, these will be delivered within existing resources.

6.2 When costs are incurred, these costs will be met from the Council's corporate training budget, which is allocated for both staff and Member development.

6.3 This budget is set at £120,000 per annum for the financial years 2026/2027 and 2027/2028, ensuring sufficient provision for development opportunities.

7 Risk Assessment

7.1 There is a risk that insufficient participation in Learning and Development 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.

8 Legal Implications

8.1 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.

9 Consultation and Communications

9.1 All Members were invited to contribute their views and identify their development needs through an all-Member survey.

10 Implementation

10.1 Member Development will be monitored annually by the General Purposes Committee.

10.2 Members of the General Purposes Committee will be asked to agree the priority areas for the 2026/27 financial year at its next meeting in March 2026.

11 Cross Cutting Issues

11.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

11.1.1 Adaptation and resilience have been considered.

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

11.2 Equalities and Diversity

11.2.1 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.

11.3 Other If Relevant

- Business Continuity / Resilience
- Health and Safety

Background Papers	Report to General Purposes Committee dated 8 October 2025
Annexes	Annex 1 - Draft Member Development Strategy 2026-2028