
Member Development Strategy 2026-2028

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1. Purpose

Purpose of the Member Development Strategy

This Member Development Strategy provides an effective framework for Councillor development at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. It sets out the guiding principles and key objectives that shape the approach to delivering effective and impactful Member learning and development.

This Member Development Strategy establishes formal mechanisms to plan, review and monitor councillor development on an ongoing basis.

2. Vision and Values

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC) is committed to supporting its elected Members as community leaders, policy makers, and advocates for residents.

Our Vision

The Council's Corporate Strategy 2023–2027 sets out our vision to be an innovative and forward-thinking council, leading the borough towards a vibrant, prosperous, and sustainable future.

Member development is essential to delivering the four key priorities of the Corporate Strategy.

Our Key Priorities

1. Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council
2. Sustaining a borough which cares for the environment
3. Improving housing options for local people whilst protecting our outdoor areas of importance
4. Investing in our local economy to help support residents and businesses and foster sustainable growth

Our Values

- **Innovation:** Embracing new ideas and technology and proactively finding solutions that improve our services to residents.
- **Transformation:** Adapting so we can meet the standards residents, businesses, and all those involved with the borough council rightly expect.
- **Delivery:** Ensuring we set ambitious targets that we strive to meet, in order to provide high-quality public services for our residents.

3. Aims

This strategy ensures TMBC Members have access to high-quality learning and development, enabling them to fulfil their roles in line with the Corporate Strategy.

Our aims are to:

- Ensure all newly elected Members are properly inducted to the Council
- Equip Members with the skills and knowledge to deliver the Council's priorities
- Ensure compliance with mandatory training
- Support development for all Members
- Deliver effective training that provides value for money
- Provide learning and development opportunities at different times and in different ways to ensure equality of opportunity

4. Governance of the Strategy

To provide high quality learning and development for Members, development needs must be assessed, reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure the needs of Councillors are understood.

It is important that Members are fully engaged in the management of the development programme, alongside officers.

The General Purposes Committee are responsible for approving the programme of Member development each year to ensure that it is responsive to Member needs. Annually, the Committee will:

- Evaluate the implementation of the previous year's development programme.
- Assess feedback via anonymous Member evaluation forms.
- Consider all councillor survey results.
- Review all feedback that is received in respect of Member Development.
- Agree areas for improvement.

5. Identifying Member Development Needs and Training Delivery

Member development needs will be identified as follows:

Identifying Corporate Training Needs

Local government is constantly evolving due to legal changes, policy updates, and shifts in corporate priorities. The Council must be alert to these changes and provide Member training, briefings and workshops that reflect such developments.

Specialist Role Needs

Some councillors take on specific responsibilities that require additional support.

These include:

- Chairs or Vice-Chairs of Committees
- Leadership, for example Leader of the Council or Leader of an Opposition Group
- Portfolio Holders
- Members sitting on Regulatory Committees such as Licensing and Planning Committees
- Scrutiny Members
- Audit and Standards Members
- Ceremonial and civic events

Learning and Development for all Members

The priority areas for all Member learning and development have been shaped by two key processes: the priorities agreed by Members of the General Purposes Committee in October 2025 and the findings of a comprehensive Member Development Survey conducted in December 2025.

These initiatives have informed a targeted approach designed to strengthen governance, compliance, financial resilience, and operational effectiveness across the Council. The resulting framework focuses on five core areas, each critical to supporting effective decision-making and delivering high standards of public service.

1. Legislative and Governance

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

There will be a focus on the following key areas:

- Continued mandatory training for Licensing and Planning Committees
- 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

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.

There will be a focus on the following key areas:

- 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

3. Finance and Governance

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

There will be a focus on the following key areas:

- Understanding the Statement of Accounts
- Internal and external audit processes
- What constitutes a balanced budget
- Regular updates on financial governance
- Risk Management and Financial Resilience
- Medium-Term Financial Planning and Forecasting

4. Compliance Training

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

There will be a focus on the following key areas:

- Equality & Diversity
- Safeguarding Children and Adults
- PREVENT
- Data Protection
- Cyber Security
- Climate Change
- Corporate Health & Safety

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.

There will be a focus on the following key areas:

- Understanding the impact of reorganisation on Council structure and decision-making
- Roles and responsibilities in the new governance framework
- Managing change and supporting staff through transition
- Financial implications of reorganisation
- Communication and engagement with residents during change

Training Delivery

To support Member development, training will be delivered through a variety of accessible and

engaging methods. Depending on the training need, sessions will be delivered through the Council's own internal resources or, where appropriate, expert training providers will be brought in.

To ensure as many Members as possible can attend training, a general development programme will be shared with all Members at the beginning of the new financial year.

Any further ad hoc training sessions that are required during the year will be channelled through the Democratic Services team to minimise clashes with other Member events.

Members will also be made aware of what training is mandatory and optional on receipt of the general development programme.

Potential development delivery methods may include:

- Briefings and workshops before committee meetings
- External conferences and seminars (in-person and via Teams/ Zoom etc), including those delivered by the Local Government Association
- Written materials
- E-Learning packages
- Sharing of knowledge between Members – shadowing and mentoring opportunities
- Establish a Member SharePoint resource library so all training material is readily accessible in a single place

6. Role of the General Purposes Committee

The Member Development Strategy is owned by the Council. However, it will be the responsibility of the General Purposes Committee supported by the Human Resources and Development team to ensure that the Strategy is reviewed and updated to incorporate any changes in best practice and that it continues to be fit for purpose.

Roles and Composition

The General Purposes Committee will review on an annual basis, the previous year's training feedback and consider the proposed development programme for the year ahead.

The General Purposes Committee will:

- Agree a draft Member Development Programme annually
- Identify needs and develop suitable learning opportunities
- Assess the effectiveness of training to ensure that training is delivered to a high standard and offers value for money
- Ensure that councillors have the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their community leadership roles effectively

- Ensure equal access for all Councillors to learning and development opportunities
- Review attendance statistics and champion and promote learning and development among Members

7. Induction

The Member Development Strategy recognises a distinction between an induction for new Members and a general development programme.

Therefore, the following specific support will be offered to new councillors:

- Any new Councillor will be provided with an Induction Pack providing a comprehensive onboarding process to the Council and practical information about being a Councillor.
- An Induction Programme and existing calendar of meetings will be provided to prospective candidates to ensure that newly-elected Councillors are already aware of training and meeting commitments required. This will assist newly elected Members in participating fully in the business of the Council as soon as possible.
- Members will be invited to meet senior officers, find out about the Council's corporate plan and service areas and given information to get them started.
- Contact details of Democratic Services will be provided to support new Members with signposting and general orientation.

8. Resourcing and Monitoring

Training Delivery and Funding

Training will primarily be delivered internally, making use of existing resources such as the Council's e-learning platform and in-house expertise. Where possible, external training will be accessed free of charge, for example through the Local Government Association (LGA) or other sector partners.

When training incurs costs, these costs will be met from the Council's corporate training budget, which is allocated for both staff and Member development. This budget is set at £120,000 per annum for the financial years 2026/2027 and 2027/2028, ensuring sufficient provision for high-quality development opportunities.

Learning and Development Monitoring

Member Development will be monitored annually by the General Purposes Committee and the following will be reviewed annually:

- Agree the priority areas for the year
- Approve the annual Member training plan
- Financial budget allocation and other capacity to support Member development activities

- Attendance across the development programme
- Conference / seminar attendance
- Effectiveness and satisfaction with individual sessions as reported in the feedback forms and any related surveys

Reporting and Continuous Improvement

Findings from the annual review will be reported to full Council.

Recommendations will focus on:

- Enhancing the quality and relevance of development opportunities.
- Ensuring equitable access for all Members.
- Aligning resources with strategic priorities and emerging challenges.