

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL



# MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

DRAFT

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## PURPOSE

This Member Development Strategy is an overarching framework for councillor development at Uttlesford District Council, setting out the principles, objectives and commitments that underpin the aims and delivery of member training. Furthermore, this Member Development Strategy establishes formal mechanisms to drive, review and monitor councillor development on an ongoing basis.

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## VISION AND VALUES

This Council is committed to making Uttlesford the best place to live, work and visit and, in order to do so, believes in developing the skills and capabilities of its workforce and councillors. The vision for this Member Development Strategy is that all councillors have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform effectively in their capacity as elected representatives of the local community.

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## AIMS

The Strategy aims to:

- promote the purpose and importance of councillor development and ensure buy-in from all levels of councillors and officers
- promote a positive and inclusive culture of learning, development and continual improvement
- strengthen councillor-officer relationships
- enhance democracy, participation and councillor diversity
- Deliver effective training that provides value for money

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## GOVERNANCE OF THE STRATEGY

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

To this end, it is important that members play their part in the management of the development programme, alongside officers. Therefore, a Member Development Working Group (MDWG) will advise the Council on member development/training matters, and will report to the Audit and Standards Committee on an annual basis. The MDWG will endorse the programme of member development each year to ensure that it is responsive to Member needs. Annually, the MDWG will:

- Evaluate the implementation of the previous year's training programme. If necessary, this Strategy will be updated to take account of lessons learned and best practice.
- Assess feedback via anonymous member evaluation forms, which Members will be asked to complete after each and every training session. Members attending external courses will also provide feedback to assess whether best value has been achieved. This feedback will be managed by Democratic Services and will inform the report to the working group.
- Consider all councillor survey results, to ascertain any issues relating to member development needs.
- Review all feedback that is received in respect of Member Development and report its findings annually to the Audit and Standards Committee.

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## IDENTIFYING NEEDS

Member development needs will be identified as follows:

### 1. 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.

### 2. Specialist Role Needs

Some councillors take on specific responsibilities that require additional training. 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

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## 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 three months in advance of the

municipal year (i.e. circulated in March), wherever possible. 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 but the following sessions will always be considered mandatory:

- Code of Conduct Training – all councillors are required to complete this training.
- Code of Conduct Panel Training - for sitting members and substitutes of the Audit and Standards Committee, this training is required to sit on Standards Panels.
- Planning Committee Training – for sitting members and substitutes of the Planning Committee, this training is required to sit on Planning Committee
- Licensing and Environmental Health Panel Training - for sitting members and substitutes of the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee, this training is required to sit on Licensing Panels.

Potential development delivery methods may include:

- Training sessions and courses, both online and in-person, and to be held across the district (e.g. Saffron Walden and Little Canfield)
- Briefings and workshops, including member / officer training when appropriate
- External conferences and seminars
- Written learning materials
- Peer Mentors
- E-Learning packages
- Visits to other Councils or relevant partners
- 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
- Cross-party training arrangements – in recognition that training is apolitical, it is recommended that informal training arrangements, such as seating and mixed workshop groups, are organised on a cross-party basis, where possible

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### **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP (MDWG)**

The Member Development Strategy is owned by the Council. However, it will be the responsibility of the MDWG and the Democratic Services 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.

The MDWG's terms of reference will regulate the group and enshrine these principles into its working practices.

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## ROLE AND COMPOSITION

The MDWG will include a member from each political group that make up the Council, with officer support being provided by Democratic Services. The Group will meet a minimum of twice a year to review the previous year's training feedback and consider the proposed development programme for the year ahead.

The main purpose of the MDWG is to:

- To agree a draft Member Development Programme annually
- To identify needs and develop suitable learning opportunities
- To 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
- To ensure equal access for all Councillors to training and development opportunities
- To review attendance statistics and champion and promote learning and development among members

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## INDUCTION

This 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.
- Before any by-election, 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 before they are elected. 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.
- All member training will be provided on key areas such as the Code of Conduct.
- Contact details of Democratic Services will be provided to support new members with signposting and general orientation.

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## RESOURCE AND MONITORING

Annually, the MDWG will review the resources that are required to support councillor development and will refer any recommendations for the member development budget to full Council (as part of the annual budget review process).

Member Development will be monitored by the MDWG and the following will be reviewed and reported to the Audit and Standards Committee annually:

- 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
- any matters relating to member development that the MDWG is minded to escalate to the committee's attention.