

## **COUNCILLOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The role as a political, civic and community leader requires responsive and resilient leadership. Serving as a councillor is a responsibility, a privilege and a hugely rewarding undertaking which is vital in shaping places where people want to live, work and play. Democracy and decision-making are strengthened when councillors are empowered to speak to, and for, communities and support the effective business of local government. If Councillors are to continue to meet these expectations in an ever-changing world, they need to make sure they have the skills and expertise to carry out their duties.
- 1.2. The Councillor Learning and Development Policy sets out the framework to enable North Northamptonshire Councillors to be equipped with the support they need in their roles. This framework is flexible to local needs whilst remaining resilient in times of national and global challenge and sets out an effective and positive approach to ensuring all councillors are supported and developed.
- 1.3. In March 2018 Max Caller was commissioned to conduct a Best Value inspection of Northamptonshire County Council. The report concluded that Northamptonshire required *“a way forward with a clean sheet, leaving all the history behind, is required.”* The report recommended: *“It is the inspection team’s clear view and recommendation that in the particular circumstances that the county finds itself in, the two unitary (West and North) model is the preferred way forward.”*
- 1.4. From early 2020 local government has faced serious challenges in multiple areas, with issues around climate change becoming even more acute than they were previously. Residents and businesses are naturally looking to their local government leaders to help them navigate these large-scale and complex problems to enable everyone to think ahead to a better, if different, future beyond the early years of the decade. Additional responsibilities have therefore been placed on locally elected representatives and communities. Continuing and emerging global and national pressures have meant that authorities have become involved in new areas, such as maximising the use of assets, developing new partnerships within and beyond local government and getting more involved in strategic service delivery. This has put training and development of councillors at the heart of the Council.

- 1.5. Councillors need a whole range of skills to embrace the increasing complexity of their individual roles as members of a unitary authority, both in their representative capacity as a ward councillor and their constitutional roles, for example as an Executive member, a member of a Committee or of an Executive Advisory Panel. In recent years, skills in areas such as working with communities, engaging with partners and lobbying have been developed to ensure that elected members not only offer more effective leadership to their communities, but work at the highest strategic level to draw down external funding to improve facilities and services in their local area.
- 1.6. Every Councillor has the right to access learning activities that will provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to effectively perform their duties.
- 1.7. The Councillor Learning and Development Policy brings together all the areas that need to be considered for the delivery of a continuously effective learning and development programme for councillors. It is designed to:
  - Set out a means of meeting the training needs of individual councillors and the organisation as a whole.
  - Help councillors to gain the skills and knowledge they require to fulfil their role as a councillor
  - Raise awareness amongst councillors of their responsibilities.
- 1.8. The success of the Policy is based on a range of inter-related areas:
  - Councillor commitment to learning, setting high standards and making open, transparent, sound decisions that will stand up to scrutiny
  - The Council's corporate priorities in relation to sustainable communities, customer service, the environment and community and rural issues
  - The Council's commitment to partnership working and fulfilling its commitments as set out in the Corporate Plan and emerging strategic local plans
  - Councillor learning and development needs, identified through the Learning Needs Analysis, individual consultations, Councillor Reviews, evaluation and impact assessments
  - Committee learning and development as identified through ongoing committee consultation
  - Sound induction and pre-induction principles and practices for new and prospective councillors
  - Encourage and develop citizenship in training, further learning and educational opportunities for all
  - Support for community initiatives in wards and areas and the skills to act as an advocate for individuals or groups as appropriate
  - An outward-looking Council which has a long-term commitment to working with partners to deliver easily accessible public services

- A council that connects with regional and national issues and seeks to influence government policy and secure the best possible outcomes for its residents
- A commitment to continuous improvement

## **2. Principles and Context**

### **Local**

- 2.1. Customers demand high levels of service from their local authority and increasingly expect public organisations to work in partnership to deliver services to them. The Council will continue to invest in technology and continuously identify what customers want. It will bring partners together in the delivery of services and develop extended partnerships, both in front-line service delivery and in back-office activities.
- 2.2. The process of identifying training and development needs for councillors and committees will need to have clear links to corporate objectives and local priorities as expressed in the Corporate Plan, strategic business plans, legal requirements and reports from inspections and/or audits. The process will also aim to take into account any specific needs identified through the annual Learning and Development Needs Analysis questionnaire and the Councillor Review Scheme. Should the need arise to provide councillors with information on issues of local significance, or to enhance the representational element of their role, such sessions will be given priority in the training and development programme.
- 2.3. The Training and Development Programme will be drawn up annually to meet the identified needs. The programme will be continually reviewed throughout the year to ensure it meets local and national priorities in a timely manner.

### **National**

- 2.4. National and international events can have an impact locally and present a challenging agenda for local authorities, resulting in stretched resources and potentially different ways of working, particularly in relation to the following areas: -
  - Climate change and the green agenda
  - Supply chain shortages and related issues
  - Police and crime initiatives
  - Education, Children and Adult Social Care
  - Levelling up

- Continuing growth and investment in North Northamptonshire and the wider region
- 2.5. The Council must maximise the resources available to it to deliver quality services in response to all of the above challenges, maintain front-line services and ensure added value for the residents of North Northamptonshire.
- 2.6 The local and national context means we are in a period of change for Local Government. Change can only be delivered by and through decision makers having the necessary skills, motivation and team behaviours required to meet these challenges.

### **Equality of Opportunity**

- 2.7 All learning opportunities are accessible across all political parties and to all councillors and conform to the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and practice.

## **3. Strategic Development Issues**

- 3.1 The following Strategic Development issues are important to equip the Council for the challenges ahead.
- i. Developing political leadership capability to enable the Council's priorities to be achieved.
  - ii. Creating shared values and behaviours throughout the organisation.
  - iii. Building adaptability and capacity to respond to the national changing environment and exploit the benefits of technology and working in partnership with others.
  - iv. Giving priority to addressing basic skills needs
  - v. Delivering training and development in innovative ways to make the best use of the resources available to the Council.
  - vi. Enabling councillors to direct and support community initiatives and act as advocates when appropriate.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **The Council's Commitment**

4.1 The Council is committed to regularly identifying and supporting the learning and skill development requirements of its councillors to ensure political capacity building and effective management of the authority.

4.2 This commitment is underpinned by:

- Seeking accreditation of the East Midlands Councillor Development Charter following the collation of sufficient evidence
- Maintaining and supporting a cross-party Councillor Development Working Group
- Councillors engaging in appropriate learning and development activity to ensure their continued effectiveness as community leaders; regulators and monitors; scrutineers; partnership workers; policy developers; strategic decision makers and members of consultation and partnership forums.
- An annual budget allocation for councillor development and adequate resources to meet the training and development needs of councillors to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities collectively or individually
- Promoting an organisation-wide understanding and recognition that councillors have individual learning and development needs
- All Councillors to participate in event evaluation analysis to inform future planning
- The Council to provide adequate officer support to the Member Development Working Group to enable it to meet its objectives

## **5. The Member Development Working Group**

The cross-party Member Development Working Group will: -

- Facilitate an annual Councillor Review programme and Learning Needs analysis to be undertaken by all councillors
- Introduce and formulate a councillor training and development programme that reflects the vision of North Northamptonshire Council and the objectives it is trying to achieve.
- Ensure individual councillors have an individual learning and development record detailing learning activities both internally and

externally, and that personal learning and development records are maintained and reviewed yearly by the Member Development Group

- Identify organisational learning and development needs, where appropriate.
- Evaluate the effectiveness and value for money of all learning activity by continuously monitoring outcomes and the effective management of the councillor training budget.
- Explore and identify new methods of learning such as interactive sessions, distance learning and e-learning
- Identify critical information needs and the most effective ways of councillors communicating that information
- Act as a co-ordinating body linking all political group learning and development needs
- Promote citizenship and local democracy in North Northamptonshire
- Produce an annual programme of training and development opportunities
- Develop and maintain an Action Plan for Councillor Development
- Ensure all seminars, briefings, advice and other formal learning opportunities are designed and delivered in relation to the Council's Corporate Priorities and other relevant strategic policies.
- Promote mentoring support for all new councillors and those who require mentoring when changing role.
- Ensure that pre-induction materials are made available for prospective councillors in the community and an induction programme is offered to every newly elected councillor.
- Implement a structured induction programme for all new councillors and ensure all new councillors attend core and mandatory training and those sitting on relevant committees, e.g. Planning and Licensing, attend the mandatory training before they take up their role.
- Identify opportunities for sharing learning activities with officers, partners, the voluntary sector and citizens of North Northamptonshire where appropriate.
- Act as a consultancy service for all councillors on training and development issues.

## **6. The Democracy and Standards Committee**

6.1 The Democracy and Standards Committee will oversee the work of the Member Development Working Group in the following respects: -

- Carry out a review of the Councillor Learning and Development Policy every three years
- Ensure that the councillor training and development programme reflects the strategic objectives for North Northamptonshire Council
- Ensure that a culture of lifelong learning is developed for all councillors at North Northamptonshire Council
- Ensure there is genuine commitment across the council to support the training and development of all councillors

## **7. Individual Learning and Development**

7.1 The Councillor Review is a yearly analysis of individual councillors' learning and development needs. It takes place as part of a guided learning and development interview with group leaders or members of the Member Development Group. Any of the following may be used to help with the analysis, but this list is not exhaustive:

- The Council's Corporate Priorities
- Councillor Role Descriptions
- New or pending legislation
- Organisational policies and practices
- Learning Styles Questionnaires
- Local, Regional and National developments
- Observations of individual current skills and behaviours
- Health and well being
- Career aspirations

7.2 The outcome of the analysis of Councillor Reviews culminates in the production of the councillor training and development programme, which is refreshed on a rolling basis, with sessions added as necessary and appropriate.

### **Councillors conducting reviews are responsible for:**

- Assisting councillors to identify training and development needs that reflect organisational and personal objectives
- Ensuring a Personal Development Plan is produced on an annual basis for each councillor through the Councillor Review process.

- Developing/contributing to councillor and committee training and development plans that reflect equality of opportunity and prioritised needs
- Identifying and encouraging career development opportunities
- Committee Learning and Development

## **8. Executive**

8.1 The emphasis is on the political executive being able to: -

- Work closely with senior officers to develop, agree and implement Council strategies
- Support scrutiny and respond positively to feedback, challenge and ideas from non-executive councillors
- Work as an Executive team and share responsibility for success and failure
- Achieve their own Portfolio Action Plan for which they are accountable to the Leader of the Council
- Work with Executive officers to collect and analyse complex information to inform budget priorities and performance plans
- Act as Council representatives at a strategic level and represent the organisation in partnership at local, regional and national levels
- Work across political and council boundaries to further communication and encourage co-operation
- Develop others and share best practice
- Represent the interests of North Northamptonshire externally, including lobbying government, and national and regional agencies and organisations, working constructively with councillors from West Northamptonshire Council, Town Councils in North Northamptonshire and the wider regions we are part of, to secure the best outcomes for our residents.

## **9. Scrutiny**

9.1 There will be occasions when Scrutiny Commission members will have sparse knowledge of a particular subject that they wish to scrutinise. At



times like these, structured learning events will need to be arranged in order for a successful scrutiny review to be achieved.

- 9.2 Scrutiny Commission learning and development needs are included in the councillor training and development programme.
- 9.3 Scrutiny Commission Members will be offered targeted training as and when required to ensure the following range of skills: -
  - To call witnesses (including Executive Members) when appropriate
  - To investigate a range of subjects as identified in the Work Programme
  - To instigate Council debates
  - To request a response from the Executive
  - To participate in topic-related Task and Finish Groups and Executive Advisory panels
- 9.4 The Council will appoint a dedicated Scrutiny Officer to ensure the Council is able to deliver high quality scrutiny.

## **10. Regulatory**

- 10.1 In order for Councillors to comply with legislation and carry out their duties effectively within the regulatory committees, the realisation of their learning needs is seen as vital. Training is mandatory for councillors sitting on regulatory committees, and they will also be required to attend any briefings and refresher training sessions which may be arranged to reflect changes in legislation or policy.
- 10.2 Councillors may not participate in regulatory committee proceedings unless the relevant training has been undertaken prior to taking up the role.
- 10.3 Councillors need to be able to evaluate arguments according to the evidence that is presented and make independent and impartial judgements. Legal processes have to be followed and councillors are placed in a position where they need to balance public needs with local policy.

## **11. Evaluation Strategy**

- 11.1 Achieving the organisation's strategic objectives is a positive reflection of effective councillor learning and development. The councillors' role in the evaluation of learning and development solutions is critical to the continuous improvement of learning events and associated materials. The organisation invests a great deal in learning and development activities and it needs to know that it is spending its money wisely.

11.2 Following learning events, it is important to discuss/gather information of the councillors' experience of the learning that has taken place, to inform future planning and in some instances reinforce the learning that has taken place. Reflection and evaluation of learning are critical elements of the learning and development process. Councillors are expected to complete evaluation forms at the end of all learning events that take place in the Council. Where events are organised by other organisations, councillors are expected to discuss the value of the events on their return and make any learning materials available to others. Evaluation will also monitor councillor access to and take-up of training opportunities.

11.3 The most common model of evaluating learning and development identifies four levels: -

1. Reaction Identifies the participant's views and feelings about what they have experienced as this can influence what and how they take the learning forward
2. Immediate Looks at what the participants have actually learned and what they can transfer to their work/life
3. Intermediate Examines the effect of the learning on their job/role performance
4. Ultimate Traces the effect of the learning on the organisation

11.4 A summary of event evaluation will be submitted to the Member Development Group annually.

### **Impact Assessments**

11.5 An impact assessment is an important process to identify the anticipated or actual impacts of a development intervention on those social, economic and environmental factors which the intervention is designed to affect or may inadvertently affect. An Impact Assessment on selected training or information events will be carried out two months after the session to assess the intended, unintended, positive and negative impacts. This will inform any future action required. The Member Development Group will identify training or information events to be the subject of an impact assessment.

11.6 The Impact Assessment will be carried out by a senior officer, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder, and will comprise the following steps: -

1. Completion of an Impact Assessment form
2. Consultation with affected stakeholders
3. Summary of preferred option with an implementation plan

11.7 The Impact Assessment will provide information on the following: -

- The rationale for the Impact Assessment
- The relevant Corporate Objective(s)
- Description of options for further action under consideration (including 'do nothing')
- Monetised and non-monetised costs and benefits of each option, including administrative burden
- Evidence to justify further action
- Risks and assumptions
- Wider impacts on the community, the environment or the local economy
- Summary and preferred option, together with an implementation plan

## **12. Operational Procedures**

12.1 It is recognised that councillors as individuals have their own preferred learning styles and therefore respond differently to different learning methods that are employed during learning events.

12.2 Time is an important factor when considering how to enable learning and development to take place effectively and with maximum access for all.

12.3 Joint learning with officers, partners or voluntary sector representatives is always considered and promoted where appropriate.

12.4 The Council actively welcomes the attendance of its partners at full Council meetings, or at committees as appropriate. In this way councillors are kept up to date with emerging plans and the delivery of local public services. Examples of such items could be responses to the demands of the growth area agenda; regeneration; budgets and initiatives in relation to climate change. This will ensure that councillors remain continuously updated on issues of local significance.

12.5 The following range of learning and development opportunities may be used: -

- Briefings/explanations of policies (some of which may take place at full Council or at Committee meetings)
- Seminars
- Workshops
- Action learning
- Role plays

- Study or site visits
- Coaching
- Mentoring
- Conferences
- E-learning websites and DVDs
- Interactive sessions
- Discussion forums
- Expert Advisers
- Case Studies
- Networking and shadowing
- Involvement in national working parties and the giving of feedback to others
- Open learning programmes
- Regional Councillor Briefing Programmes and Events

### **13. The Structure of Training**

13.1 The councillor training and development provision for North Northamptonshire Council will include core, mandatory and optional training. The annual programme will include refresher training on Development Control, Licensing and other mandatory training. Other topic areas covered may include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction for New Councillors</li> <li>• Good governance and standards including councillor/officer relations</li> <li>• Overview and Scrutiny</li> <li>• Local Government Finance</li> <li>• Employment Committee and joint liaison Training</li> <li>• Development Control</li> <li>• Licensing</li> <li>• Working with Communities</li> <li>• Case Working</li> <li>• New Initiatives (internally or externally driven)</li> <li>• Sustainability and climate change</li> <li>• Performance Management</li> <li>• Health and Safety/Personal Safety</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress Awareness</li> <li>• Speed Reading</li> <li>• Chairing a Meeting</li> <li>• Managing Public Meetings</li> <li>• Confident Speaking</li> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Media Management</li> <li>• Political Leadership/Leading Groups</li> <li>• Communication Skills</li> <li>• IT Skills</li> <li>• Assertiveness</li> <li>• Project Management</li> <li>• Management of Change</li> <li>• Managing a Portfolio</li> </ul> |
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## **14. Travel and Subsistence Claims whilst Training**

Full details are available from Democratic Services. Councillors should seek prior approval to ensure compliance with audit requirements.

## **15. Attendance**

Councillor attendance at in-house training events will be recorded. Printouts will be made available should they be required at the Councillor Review meetings and will be submitted annually to the Member Development Group.