



LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL
Promoting City, Coast & Countryside

Lancaster City Council Member Development Strategy 2014/15

Introduction from the Chairman

Lancaster City Council retained level one of the North West Member Development Charter in 2013, and now I want to build on that success to establish member development as a truly member-led service for the benefit of all councillors.

To achieve this, we will need support from across the political groups, and for members of Council Business Committee to challenge and shape member development, and promote engagement within their groups.

In addressing the priorities in this strategy, I am confident that we can make genuine improvements to all aspects of member development, and also contribute to the aims of the Corporate Plan.

The Corporate Plan sets out the council's priorities and informs much of the member development work which takes place throughout the year. Alongside community leadership, this year's plan will maintain the council's focus on:

- sustainable economic growth;
- health and wellbeing; and
- clean, green and safe places.

Over the course of the year, we will ensure that members can receive training on all aspects of the Corporate Plan, and will work hard to engage more councillors with the planning and evaluation of member development.

Councillor Janet Hall
Chairman, Council Business Committee

Objectives

This year's strategy has five objectives:

- 1. Corporate Priorities**
- 2. Member Development Charter**
- 3. IT Support**
- 4. Training Opportunities**
- 5. Induction 2015**

1. Corporate Priorities

In February 2014, Council approved the vision, ethos and priorities that will inform the Corporate Plan from 2014 – 2016. The four key priorities remain as:

- clean, green and safe places;
- health and wellbeing;
- community leadership; and
- sustainable economic growth.

Moreover, Council agreed to adopt an ‘ensuring council’ ethos, which means that the organisation will:

- (i) recognise the responsibility of local authorities to be active stewards of their communities;
- (ii) highlight the democratic legitimacy of local authorities, placing politics and public value before reliance on competitive markets;
- (iii) endorse collaboration with citizens and stakeholders, rather than competition and contractual relations;
- (iv) acknowledge the responsibilities of local government for advancing social justice through its strategic mobilisation of public employment and civic entrepreneurship.

This ethos will inform member training opportunities over the life of the Corporate Plan, as will the emphasis on community leadership. Whilst a proposed Community Leadership Conference could not go ahead in summer 2014 owing to a lack of numbers, Democratic Services officers will ensure that community leadership training opportunities are available to all councillors throughout 2014/15.

Whilst the Corporate Plan sets out the council’s four priorities, it also needs to ensure it has the resources to deliver them, which is an increasing challenge. The member development programme will reflect the need to provide value for money, both in terms of the way it is delivered, and by keeping members engaged with the council’s financial position.

2. Member Development Charter

The council successfully retained the Member Development Charter in 2013, with assessors from the North West Employers Organisation (NWEO) reporting that councillors had been very positive about the difference which member development had made to them.

However, the assessors also felt that more input from councillors was needed to make member development a truly ‘member-led’ process. As such, the NWEO made a number of recommendations about how to increase councillors’ involvement in evaluating and planning member development events, and these were put to Council Business Committee in January 2014.

Subsequently, the political groups were sent a copy of the NWEO's recommendations for improvement and invited to comment on how they would like to take a more active role in shaping member development.

Over the course of the municipal year, a major priority of member development work will be to improve councillors' engagement, both in terms of shaping the programme and increasing attendance at events.

3. IT Support

Reliable access to email, agendas and the council's network is crucial to councillors' work, and officers continue to work on improvements to the system.

The ICT department has recently upgraded the operating system of the council's computers from Windows XP to Windows 8.1, and will be transferring councillors' laptops to the same system over the course of the year, subject to the security aspects for arrangements gaining the necessary external accreditation. Once the transfer has been completed, councillors should find it much easier to connect to the council's network, and enjoy greater reliability once connected.

However, councillors are continuing to report a number of frustrations with current IT provision, and until the upgrade to Windows 8.1 can take place, these are liable to continue. As such, an IT steering group comprised of councillors, ICT and Democratic Services staff will continue to meet. The purpose of the steering group is to discuss current IT problems and issues facing councillors, work out a way to address them, and to agree a programme of future IT provision for elected members.

Improvements to councillors' IT facilities remains a priority issue, and Democratic Services will work with officers from ICT to provide all the training necessary so that councillors can make the most of the new software and equipment once installed.

4. Training Opportunities

Democratic Services run a rolling training programme which combines:

- monthly member briefings;
- internal committee and skill-specific training;
- joint training with other councils; and.
- support for champions.

Member Briefings are held once a month, and provide a detailed insight into various aspects of the council's work and also community projects. Hosted by senior officers and often involving site visits, member briefings are held over the course of the municipal year.

Whilst attendance has remained on the low side during this term, Democratic Services are working to increase participation. A questionnaire will be issued to all councillors in summer 2014 to establish the most popular subjects for training, and the times and days on which councillors would like events to be held. Whilst these questions are covered

in Personal Development Plan interviews, the questionnaire was designed as a refresh for the final year of the current term.

The results of the questionnaire will be used to guide the member training programme until May 2015, and will help to inform reports to Council Business Committee.

In addition to internal events, Democratic Services will continue to advertise external events from the North West Employers Organisation and other providers to councillors, arranging transport where required to make it easy for members to access training opportunities. Democratic Services will also continue to work with neighbouring local authorities to arrange joint training sessions. This has proved to be a successful way of providing networking opportunities for councillors whilst sharing the costs of training with other authorities.

Over recent years, Democratic Services has provided officer support for member champions, and that will continue over the course of this year. There are currently member champions for children and younger people, older people, and veterans.

A Democratic Support officer supports the champions with briefings on subjects relevant to their field, by attending meetings, and providing general support to their work as a champion.

5. Induction 2015

With elections to the city council approaching in May 2015, a major priority for member development this year will be to prepare a high quality induction programme for new and returning councillors. The council has established a successful format for inductions over recent years, with 91% of respondents to a survey in 2011 reporting that they 'feel much more informed about my role as a councillor having undergone the induction', and next year's programme will build on that model.

The induction includes a freshers' fair-style event held shortly after the election, which gives councillors the chance to meet senior officers in an informal setting, and hear presentations on their role and how the council operates. This is followed by a comprehensive programme of training on all facets of the council's work. The training includes mandatory sessions on the code of conduct, equality issues, and committee functions, together with skills specific training and overviews of council services.

Council Business Committee will be given the chance to shape the induction process, and will consider a report during the planning stages at which members' input will be welcomed.

Officer Support

Democratic Services offer day-to-day support, and are responsible for co-ordinating member development work at the council. In the first instance, please use these contact details:

Peter Baines, Senior Democratic Support Officer
Tel: (01524) 582074, Email: pbaines@lancaster.gov.uk