



**LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL**  
*Promoting City, Coast & Countryside*

# **Lancaster City Council Member Development Strategy 2012/13**

## **Introduction from the Chairman**

This strategy sets out the council's member development priorities for the coming year, based on the Corporate Plan and feedback from councillors.

Members face a continuing challenge to provide quality services in a period of sustained austerity, and this document is designed to ensure that the right kind of training and support is in place.

Reviewed on an annual basis by the Council Business Committee, this year's strategy builds on the previous version by maintaining a strong focus on community leadership. In addition, it contains a commitment to review the council's Member Development Charter award.

The Corporate Plan sets out the council's priorities and informs much of the member training work which takes place throughout the year. Alongside community leadership, this year's Corporate Plan identifies the following themes as key priorities for the coming year:

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

Democratic Services will ensure that each of these themes is reflected in a rolling training programme. This work will also be informed by councillors' feedback and will take in external support from the *Keep It REAL (Responsive, Efficient, Accountable, and Local)* programme, being delivered by the Local Government Association.

Richard Newman-Thompson  
Chairman, Council Business Committee

## **Objectives**

This year's strategy has five objectives:

- 1. To provide support on the relevant themes of the Corporate Plan, with a particular focus on community leadership**
- 2. To complete a successful review of the council's Member Development Charter**
- 3. To contribute toward improved IT facilities for elected members**
- 4. To hold high quality training sessions in partnership with neighbouring authorities**
- 5. To run an effective internal training programme**

## **1. To provide support on the relevant themes of the Corporate Plan, with a particular emphasis on community leadership**

The Council's long term ambition is that:

*by promoting city, coast and countryside, we will secure a safe and prosperous community that is proud of its natural and cultural assets and provides lasting opportunities for all.*

To pursue this, the Council recently approved four main priorities in the Corporate Plan:

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

Whilst elected Members will contribute to all of the above, the Corporate Plan sets out a success measure in relation to community leadership with a direct relevance to member development:

*...increased number of Councillors undertaking training/development in community leadership.*

A range of events will be held over the course of the year to achieve this, both led by officers from the council and taking place under the *Keep It REAL* programme.

Keep It REAL is a Local Government Association (LGA) scheme, running from February – December 2012, to support councils on an issue of local importance. In Lancaster, officers from Community Engagement wrote a bid for Keep It REAL support, in which they identified the need for 'a major shift in the role of ward councillors...to become more visible, approachable, accessible, proactive and engaging'.

Keep It REAL will support the council by providing a team of external facilitators, member and officer peers, and national civil society experts. A steering group has been established to co-ordinate Keep It REAL in Lancaster, featuring councillors working with an LGA facilitator.

In addition to Keep It REAL, Democratic Services will continue to run a series of events for members on community leadership and wider aspects of the corporate plan. In particular, this year will see the return of cultural taster sessions, designed to increase members' knowledge and understanding of some of the different cultures that exist within the district.

## **2. To complete a successful review of the council's Member Development Charter**

The Member Development Charter is an award which recognises a local authority's commitment to member development. The council was awarded level one of the Charter in 2008.

The Charter helps to build elected member capacity by improving skills, knowledge and experience. It was developed by Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly the IDeA) and the nine regional employers organisations.

Administered in the region by the North West Employers Organisation (NWEO), the Charter operates at two levels; Level One is awarded to local authorities with a strong member development function, whilst Level Two takes Councillor development a stage further.

Lancaster's level one award is now due for review, and the Council Business Committee has determined that the council should work to retain it. To be successful, the council will need to demonstrate compliance with the following six points:

- i. continued commitment to member development demonstrated at all levels across the council;
- ii. an established member development strategy to support organisational needs and overall strategy;
- iii. clarity of subject area and methods of delivery based on member needs assessments;
- iv. 75% of members having completed a personal development plan;
- v. clear communication strategy which supports member development;
- vi. a method of evaluating learning and development activities and continuous improvement.

Officers are currently working to gather evidence in support of retaining the charter, and will produce regular reports for consideration at Council Business Committee throughout the year.

### **3. To contribute toward improved IT facilities for elected members**

It has become clear, as of summer 2012, that some aspects of members' IT provision are no longer fit for purpose. Whilst councillors' IT provision is delivered by the ICT department, it is essential that members work closely with ICT to ensure that improvements are focussed on need.

Easy access to email, word processing and electronic council documents is essential for councillors in this day and age, and it is important that all members of the council have this. To make the best use of technology, and justify the cost of providing it, it is also essential that members are confident in their use of IT.

Improving the current situation will need the input of councillors and members of staff from the ICT department and Democratic Services and an IT Steering Group has been formed to enable that.

The steering group will start from scratch with a needs assessment, and work from there to ensure that the most appropriate hardware, software and training is available to all councillors.

#### **4. Joint training**

Democratic Services has organised a range of joint training events over the course of the previous year, to which members and officers have been invited from neighbouring authorities.

This has proved to be a successful means of providing networking opportunities for members, introducing new points of view for discussion, and keeping the cost of training down for the council.

Sessions on scrutiny, chairing skills and various forms of licensing have been held in this vein over the past year, and Democratic Services will continue to work with local authorities throughout Cumbria and Lancashire to provide similar events in 2012/13.

#### **5. Run an effective internal training programme**

Member Briefings are run on a monthly basis by Democratic Services, and provide a detailed insight into different aspects of the council's work. Hosted by senior officers and often involving site visits, member briefings will continue to be held over the course of the municipal year.

Attendance figures have been disappointingly low at member briefings since the 2011 local election, and Democratic Services will work hard to increase the level of participation over the coming year. Personal Development Plans have given a clear indication of the subjects members would like further training on, and officers will act on that to offer sessions which are attractive and relevant.

Member briefings are now offered routinely at 6.10pm to accommodate councillors in full time employment, and it is hoped that increasing numbers will begin to engage with the sessions.

Finally, additional events will continue on an ad hoc basis, in response to developments at the council, and to further the Council's relationship with external partners such as nearby local authorities, universities and other public service organisations in the area.

## **Officer Support**

Democratic Services offer day-to-day support, and are responsible for co-ordinating member development work at the Council. The key officers to contact are:

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