



LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL
Promoting City, Coast & Countryside

Lancaster City Council Member Development Strategy 2013/14

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 and supporting the council's Corporate Plan objectives.

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 address each theme in a rolling training programme that is also informed by feedback from councillors, essential to ensuring that member development remains relevant and effective.

Councillor Paul Aitchison
Chairman, Council Business Committee

Objectives

This year's strategy has six objectives:

- 1. Provide support for members to deliver the Corporate Priorities and develop their Community Leadership skills.**
- 2. Maintain level one of the Member Development Charter**
- 3. Contribute toward improving IT facilities for councillors**
- 4. Provide high quality training**
- 5. Support member champions**

1. Provide support for members to deliver the Corporate Priorities and develop their Community Leadership skills.

The Corporate Plan 2013 has set the following priorities:

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

Whilst councillors shape those priorities and contribute to each one's delivery, there is a specific success measure which asks Democratic Services to increase the number of councillors undertaking training in community leadership.

In 2012, this work was bolstered by the 'Keep it REAL' programme, which drew on support from the LGA to try and develop councillors' community leadership skills. Whilst the LGA involvement in that programme has now come to an end, the Council is still keen to support and strengthen Councillors' abilities as community leaders.

There will be opportunities for councillors to improve their community leadership skills throughout 2013/14, together with a clear focus on the other Corporate Plan priorities. Service Heads are holding member briefings during summer and autumn 2013 on the current Corporate Plan objectives, to ensure that members are informed and consulted on the council's main priorities.

2. Maintain level one of the Member Development Charter

The Member Development Charter signifies that councils give their members the chance to develop skills, knowledge and experience to a given standard. It was developed by Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly the IDeA) and the nine regional employers organisations.

Administered here 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, level two takes things a step further.

Lancaster City Council was awarded level one of the Charter in 2008 and has submitted an application to retain the award. When the application has been assessed by the NWEO they will interview elected members of the council and make a decision. The box below sets out the NWEO's standard interview practice:

Time	Assessment appointment
45mins Interview/Group 1	Chairman of Council Business Committee Vice-Chairman of Council Business Committee Member Services Officer Democratic Services Manager
45mins Interview/Group 2	Leader of the Council Chief Executive
45mins Interview/Group 3	Four randomly selected councillors (including a newly elected member, existing member, and cross party, male and female)

To be successful, the council will need to demonstrate:

- 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.

In the event that the council's application is successful, Lancaster can expect to receive confirmation that Level 1 status has been retained in September 2013.

3. Contribute toward improved IT facilities for elected members

Councillors' IT provision has been problematic for some time, and last year a steering group of councillors and officers from Democratic Services and ICT was formed to

address the problem. As a result of their discussions, there will be a number of changes taking place over the course of this year.

The ICT department is currently preparing to upgrade all computers from Windows XP to Windows 8, which should significantly enhance the quality of remote working. Councillors should find that it is much easier to connect to the council's network, that the reliability of that connection should be improved, and that it should be much easier to open email attachments.

One of the group's main conclusions was that councillors needed laptop computers with longer battery life, and five new laptops will be issued to members over the summer as part of a pilot project.

Councillors will not be restricted to using laptops however, and there will be a choice of laptops, notebooks, tablets and *windows to go* USB devices (which allow councillors to use their own machines, providing they use Windows 8).

Improvements to IT facilities have been prioritised to help councillors respond more efficiently to the needs of their wards, and to give reliable access to the council network. Democratic Services will work with officers from ICT to provide all the training necessary to ensure that councillors can make the most of the new software and equipment as it becomes available.

4. Provide high quality training

Democratic Services run a rolling training programme which combines:

- monthly member briefings;
- internal committee and skill-specific training; and
- joint training with other councils

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. The first half of this year's programme will focus on various strands of the Corporate Plan.

Whilst attendance figures have remained on the low side since the 2011 local elections, Democratic Services are working to increase participation by holding events at different times of day to accommodate those who work, and by reviewing councillors' personal development plans. The reviews have taken place to make sure that the training programme reflects current demand from councillors, and we continue to offer courses from North West Employers and other external training providers.

In addition, Democratic Services continue to work with other local authorities to arrange joint training sessions on topics of mutual benefit. This has proved to be a very successful way of providing networking opportunities, introducing new points of view for discussion, and keeping the cost of training down for the council. Democratic Services

will continue to work with local authorities throughout Cumbria and Lancashire to provide similar events in 2013/14.

Finally, additional events will continue to be arranged on an ad hoc basis, in response to developments at the council, and to further the Council's relationship with external partners.

5. Support for member champions

Over the past two years, the council has appointed member champions for older people, younger people and children, and veterans.

The idea is that member champions will work in partnership with Cabinet, scrutiny committees, council officers and external organisations to bring about improvements to service provision for these groups.

The chief functions of member champions are to:

- (a) support and focus on an aspect of the Council's services, priorities or aims.
- (b) emphasise and promote social inclusion.
- (c) provide a focus for liaison with community interests.
- (d) engage non-Cabinet Members in specific and general aspects of community leadership.
- (e) be a catalyst for improvement and engagement.
- (f) contribute towards efficiency and effectiveness
- (g) ensure the championed interest is kept in focus by the Council, Cabinet Members and the Overview and Scrutiny function.

Member champions will help the council to meet a wide range of policy targets, and can encourage serious consideration of their subject area in various council meetings and other activities. A model job description has been produced for the roles, and Democratic Services will work with each champion to ensure that every effort is made to supply support and development opportunities relevant to their role.

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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