

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Being a councillor of a local authority has rarely been as challenging as in the current environment. The role of a councillor has traditionally been complex and varied but the structure of today's council with its executive/scrutiny division of responsibilities, partnership working and the plethora of organisations that contribute towards achievement of Local Area Agreement targets mean that councillors need an extensive range of skills and knowledge to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively.
- 1.2 Huntingdonshire District Council has therefore committed itself to set high standards in its delivery of training and support to its elected councillors. In recognition of that commitment, the Council is working towards the achievement of the Member Development Charter promoted by the Improvement and Development Agency as a nationally recognised standard of performance.

2. Aims

- 2.1 One of the aims of the Council's corporate plan 'Growing Success' is to learn and develop by ensuring that councillors (and employees) have appropriate skills, knowledge and behaviours and develop a culture of innovation. This will be achieved by –
- identifying development needs through individual skills analysis forms and delivering appropriate learning and development opportunities;
 - enabling members to carry out their role efficiently and effectively;
 - being clear about the skills and competencies needed to achieve the Council's objectives;
 - preparing and delivering development plans for councillors;
 - incorporating training, development and learning in future strategic plans and policies;
 - Keeping members up to date with new legislation and changing policies;

- encouraging councillors to share ideas, experience and knowledge internally and with partners;
- ensuring equal access for all members to training and development in accordance with the Council's equalities strategy; and
- effective communications.

3. How Will This Be Achieved?

- 3.1 The Leaders of the political groups on the Council and the Chief Executive have signed a commitment to achieve IDeA Member Development Charter status and to provide the necessary support and assistance to equip individual councillors with the skills and knowledge that they need.
- 3.2 This policy which has been adopted by the Cabinet is an integral part of realising the Council's corporate plan and achieving charter status.
- 3.3 Its aims can be summarised as –
- ensuring that all councillors can play a full and active part in the delivery of the Council's functions;
 - equipping councillors with the skills necessary to undertake their individual roles and responsibilities effectively; and
 - ensuring that newly elected councillors are familiar with what is expected of them.
- 3.4 The Cabinet has established a Member Development Group comprising representatives of each of the political groups with responsibility for implementing this policy and monitoring performance.
- 3.5 In so doing the Member Development Group will have regard to relevant policies and strategies of the Council and in particular its equalities strategy.

4. Specific Responsibilities

- 4.1 The Cabinet will ensure that –
- a Member Development Policy is in place and reviewed from time to time;
 - a culture of learning and support for councillors is embedded within the authority;

- there is a commitment within the authority to support the training and development of councillors;
- role descriptions will be in place and updated for all positions held by councillors that attract a special responsibility allowance and for individual councillors, mentors and political group leaders;
- there is equality of opportunity in accessing development opportunities for all councillors; and
- adequate resources are made available to meet the training and development needs identified in this policy and the councillor training and development plan.

4.2 The Member Development Group will ensure that –

- an assessment of the training needs of councillors is undertaken at regular intervals;
- personal development plans (PDPs) carried out by an external member peer are undertaken for individual councillors and reviewed on an annual basis;
- a training and development plan is produced each year that reflects the outcome of the assessment of training needs and an analysis of PDPs that have been undertaken;
- the feedback responses from councillors who have attended events are evaluated; and.
- the Council works towards and achieves Member Development Charter status.

4.3 The political groups will –

- nominate experienced councillors to act as mentors for newly elected councillors of their respective parties; and
- encourage councillors in their respective parties to adopt a positive approach to training and development by attending relevant courses and training.

4.4 Individual councillors have a responsibility to –

- commit to gaining the skills necessary to enable them to undertake their role as councillors in a responsible and efficient manner;
- attend a minimum of three relevant training or briefing sessions in the course of each year;

- ensure that they attend sessions on which they have been allocated a place or notify the appropriate officer at least 48 hours in advance if they are unable to do so;
- complete a PDP and ensure that it is met;
- volunteer to act as mentors for newly elected councillors.

5. Implementing the Policy

5.1 The promotion of local democracy and the encouragement of members of the public to stand for election are critical to the well-being of the local community and an integral element of the fabric of local society. The Council will endeavour to develop an environment where members of the public want to serve their community by becoming local councillors and to attract candidates who are representative of those communities. It therefore recognises that the training and development needs of its councillors are as equally important as that of its employees and that support and assistance is essential to enable its councillors to undertake their roles effectively.

5.2 As part of the implementation of this policy, the Council will –

- ensure that a comprehensive induction programme is in place for newly elected councillors to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary information that they need to meet the standards required by Huntingdonshire Council;
- provide appropriate training in relation to the specific panels etc. to which councillors are appointed (e.g. Development Management, Licensing, Overview and Scrutiny, Standards etc.);
- deliver skills training in areas that will enable councillors to meet the responsibilities defined in their specific and more general role descriptions;
- provide skills and training to ensure that councillors can communicate effectively both internally and with partners, customers and the media;
- equip councillors to take advantage of the benefits of electronic communication and ways of working,
- ensure that councillors are familiar with and comply with the Council's equalities strategy, and
- Deliver appropriate health and safety training.

6. What Resources Will Be Available?

6.1 The Council recognises that this policy cannot be implemented without appropriate resources being made available. The Council therefore will

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- provide a budget annually that is appropriate to meet the training and development needs of its councillors as illustrated in this policy;
- seek external sources of funding to supplement its budget for councillor training and development;
- allocate suitable employee support to ensure the effective delivery of this policy and support and assist councillors in their various roles;
- provide suitable computer and related equipment to enable councillors to take advantage of technology.