

Councillor Learning and Development

Introduction

The Councillor Learning and Development Policy has been produced to support the learning and development needs of all elected Members of Daventry District Council (Councillors).

The aim of the policy is to ensure that elected Members have full opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills to help the Council to achieve its objectives.

Policy Statement

Daventry District Council is committed to supporting the learning and development needs of all its Members as it believes that to achieve the Council's objectives knowledgeable and well informed Members are essential. Members will be given appropriate opportunities to access learning activities that will provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to effectively perform their duties.

Responsibilities

The Council has a responsibility to ensure that:

- The Councillor Learning and Development Strategies support the Council's objectives and Corporate Strategic Plan.
- There is genuine commitment across the Council for the learning and development of all elected Members.
- There is equality of opportunity in accessing development opportunities across the Council.
- Adequate resources are allocated to meet the learning and development needs identified in the Councillor Learning and Development Strategy

The Members' Learning and Development Group has a responsibility to ensure that:

- Learning resources are allocated in an open and transparent process on the basis of identified needs.

- Member learning is provided which reflects personal, committee and Council needs. Requirements are prioritised in line with priority needs which reflect the Corporate Strategic Plan.
- The effectiveness of learning is evaluated in relation to the costs and benefits of developing Members and its impact on performance.
- Assisting Members to identify learning and development needs that reflect organisational and personal objectives.

All elected Members are responsible for:

- Identifying their learning and development requirements to help them to carry out their duties
- Actively engaging in learning and development activities to enhance the delivery of services to everyone who works and lives within the District.

How will we achieve this?

Introduction

Members are required to make decisions on a wide range of issues, some of which are extremely complex, and the outcome of which may not be apparent for some time to come. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences and collectively bring an extensive range of knowledge and skills which can benefit the Council and thereby the community. The Council's objective is to ensure that Members are well informed and able to contribute and also that the Council is able to make use of the knowledge and skills that they bring to their roles from elsewhere.

Members' Learning and Development Group

Member learning and development is overseen by the Member Learning and Development Group. This cross party group meets quarterly and agrees the Member learning and development activities with reference to the Corporate Strategic Plan and priority development needs. The Group monitors the training budget and reviews the outcome of training events.

Member Development Records

Members attendance at learning events is recorded on the DDC website in their personal details section.

Role Profiles

Role profiles have been produced for Members with specific role profiles for those with particular responsibilities, such as portfolio holders. These assist both Members and the public to understand what their remit is. The profiles also include the knowledge and skills that are required for the role.

Identifying and Prioritising Learning Needs

Learning and development needs for Councillors and Committees are linked to the outcomes from the Council's Corporate Strategic Plan and objectives.

Priority development needs which support these outcomes are:

- technical knowledge eg in finance, planning and licensing
- communication skills eg public speaking, media skills
- personal effectiveness eg time management, personal safety
- leadership skills eg within the community and within the Council
- Scrutiny eg questioning and challenging skills
- Senior team development eg political leadership

a. Member Level

Members may ask a facilitator to assist them to identify their personal development needs, either a member of the HR team or a member of the Learning and Development Group.

Individual Members can make requests through the Chair of the Learning & Development Group or to the Governance & HR Manager.

b. Committee Level

The Chairman of each Committee is asked to indicate at the beginning of the Council year specific learning and development needs that their Committee may have.

c. Council level

Council officers are asked for their input particularly in relation to new legislation or possible methods of service delivery for example. Some training is mandatory eg planning and licencing

Corporate Training Plan

The outcome of the individual Member requests, the committee needs and the corporate input are considered and requests prioritised in relation to the Council's objectives, the priority development needs and resources available. The Member Learning and Development Group oversees the programme.

Delivery of Learning and Development Events

a. Internal Events

Regular events are arranged for all Members to attend. Most months a Wednesday evening is set aside for Member development in the corporate calendar. Other dates are also agreed on an ad hoc basis to accommodate additional learning events. Dates are included in the schedule of committee meetings issued to all Members.

A dedicated dashboard for Member Development will be provided on the Council's E-Learning platform DavLearn. The programme of dates and activities can also be found in the Councillor section in Davnet and on the noticeboard in the Members Room. Information about planned events is emailed to all Members at least two weeks in advance of a planned event,

There are a number of different ways of meeting learning needs – attending seminars or conferences, e-learning, role play, workshops, case studies, networking or discussion forums to name a few. When arranging inhouse training the Council aims to arrange a variety of learning events which suit as many Councillors as possible.

b. External Events

Members who wish to attend an external event complete an application form which can be found either on the Councillor section on Davnet or by contacting HR. They need to identify the benefit to the Council and to themselves in relation to the Corporate Strategic Plan and their role within the Council, along with the cost of attendance. The Learning and Development Group consider the application and decide whether the course is worthwhile in terms of costs and benefits.

To ensure that the allocated budgets are used fairly and equitably for the benefit of all Members and the Council the following criteria are applied by the Learning and Development Group when considering individual requests:

- i. Needs identified for portfolio holders/committee chairmen to assist them to undertake their role.
- ii. Needs identified for committee Members.

- iii. The event or seminar must meet the needs of the corporate plan.
- iv. The course should assist the Member in carrying out their function on behalf of the Council.
- v. Needs identified through individual development needs assessment.
- vi. Fair allocation of resources

Attendees are expected to feedback the information gained from the course to other Members so that all can benefit. A feedback form is available to assist with this.

Davnet

Davnet, the Council's intranet, includes a section specifically for Member learning and development. Presentations from past events and information about future events can be found there. There is also a link to the IDEA website which gives Members access to their workbooks covering a variety of topics.

DavLearn

The Council's E-learning platform will be developed to provide a Member Development dashboard which will be used to promote development activities, with the aim of providing a 'blended learning' approach. Utilising e-Learning and other resources to provide introductory information in advance of learning events with the aim of promoting the learning event, engaging with Councillors and providing effective evaluation of learning activities following the training.

Induction

Induction for new Members takes place every year that local elections are held in May in the District, with individual arrangements being made for new Members at other times of the year. This includes a planned programme with input from the Chief Executive, the Leader and the Chair of Scrutiny. Topics covered are the Council's vision, values and objectives; the decision making process; Councillor responsibilities and Councillor development. New Members are assigned a buddy who they can refer to in the first few months. New Members also meet the Monitoring Officer for advice on governance and standards issues, the Chief Financial Officer for finance related issues and the Business, Community and Resources Managers to learn more about service delivery.

Joint Learning

Opportunities are taken to work with partners on joint events where possible. This enables networking, sharing of ideas and identifying solutions to problems. Identified partners with whom learning can be shared are:

- other local authorities
- parish councils
- the police
- health
- local community groups
- university and colleges

Evaluation

It is important for the Council to evaluate Members' learning and development to ensure that it has met its objectives; to ensure that the Council has received value for money in terms of the cost and the benefits; and to identify where improvements can be made in the future.

The Member Learning and Development Group play a strong role in evaluation and there is a standing item for evaluation on the agenda at each meeting. The group will review the numbers attending and the feedback from learning events.

Evaluation can take place at more than one level. At its most basic level, evaluation considers attendees' reaction to the training, whether it was positive or not. The second level looks at how much the attendees learned and the next level looks at what extent attendees changed their behaviour. The last level looks at the impact on the organisation as a cost/benefit analysis. A range of evaluation methods can be used:

- use of questionnaires
- focus groups can be brought together for the evaluator to gain feedback
- informal discussions take place on an ad hoc basis between or with Members and officers on the value of the training
- case studies can be produced using a particular topic to show a measurable change before and after

. Members are asked to complete an evaluation form after attending a learning event. To assist in the evaluation the form will specify the outcomes expected at individual Member, corporate and community level.

Some sessions will be evaluated principally through qualitative means eg that councillors feel more knowledgeable, better able to understand complex issues and make informed decisions.

The Chair of the group will compile and present an annual report to Members on the year's learning and development events, together with evaluations.

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