

Test Valley Borough Council

Members' Development Strategy

Introduction

The Council wishes to encourage people from a range of backgrounds to stand for election to become Borough Councillors. We have worked hard to make the Councillor's role one which is rewarding and fulfilling. At the same time we have put a number of things in place to help Councillors make a really positive contribution to the communities they serve. The role that our councillors play in their communities as community leaders has received national recognition.

The Council underwent a Local Government Association Peer review in October 2018. The review team commented that "the council's community councillor model is well-resourced and highly regarded. Each councillor has access to a dedicated geographically-focused officer to help address local issues. In addition, the council has invested £1.5 million of New Homes Bonus funding into a councillor community grant scheme and a community asset fund to support local initiatives to get off the ground. The community councillor initiative has received national recognition and the council has actively sought to share its learning, including through its collaboration with De Montfort University." It is a great time to be a councillor in Test Valley!

Nevertheless, the council appreciates the important and often complex role councillors have to play. It is vital that they are given the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills to best serve their communities. Borough Councillors are often the most local of the democratically elected office holders serving our communities. As a result they are often people's first port of call.

Training and development is important for all members; those who are newly elected as well as the more established members. Induction for new members is crucial as they begin their roles and equips them with the tools that will help them be an effective councillor. Whilst existing councillors have more experience, continued training helps to ensure an updated skill set.

This strategy sets out the ways in which we intend to help our councillors in that journey.

The Member and Community Development Group

The development of the Member Development Strategy has been led by the Member and Community Development Group. The Group is a cross-party group chaired by the Leader of the Council.

The Group will:

Develop the annual member development programme in consultation with officers.

Provide guidance and insight to all councillor training and development issues.

Promote and encourage the benefits of participating in the Member development process amongst councillors

Seek feedback from councillors about the impact of training and future requirements.

Undertake “horizon scanning” to ensure that the development programme is fit for purpose.

The Annual Member Development Programme

The Annual Member Development programme will be built on the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are required to undertake the various roles described in the Annexes to this strategy. At its core will be the role of the Community Councillor and the Council’s Corporate Plan aspirations. The Council has developed role descriptions for the various functions that Councillors will undertake as part of their duties.

An annual questionnaire to Councillors about the development needs they require to undertake their various roles will also help shape the programme.

The Council will provide a comprehensive induction package for incoming elected councillors. The current induction programme has been developed over a period of time in conjunction with the Member and Community Development Group. It is appended as an Annex to this Strategy.

How members can access training opportunities

The Democratic Services Manager will assist Members in identifying their training and development needs. In particular this will consider the skills and knowledge required to undertake the positions described in the role descriptions.

The Council also has an annual Members' Training Budget which exists to help members fulfil their development needs. Members can put proposals forward to access this budget by contacting the Democratic Services Manager and highlighting the development need the proposed training will assist them with.

The approaches to learning

The Council will provide a range of different opportunities for attendance at various informal and formal learning events, including conferences, seminars, training courses, briefings and workshops. Feedback on each training opportunity will be provided so that the Member and Community Development Group can assess effectiveness to inform the development of the Annual Member Development Programme.

The Council recognises the need for knowledge as well as training. There will be a number of briefings, seminars and workshops held that will provide information in respect of local and national issues. There will also be a range of other events that councillors may wish to nominate themselves to attend, or be invited to attend by officers/service areas, and these events may include external conferences.