

Blaby District Council

**Draft Member Development
Strategy**

2023- 2027



Foreword from the Leader of the Council and Chairman

The Blaby District Council Member Development Strategy sets out our commitment to continuous Councillor Development, our approach and the opportunities available to elected Members.

We are focused on ensuring all of our Members have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles as Members of Blaby District Council and provide effective community leadership for our communities.

As Councillors with a broad range of skills and experience, we understand the challenges faced by the modern-day Councillor, including in the period shortly after the election when considerable learning is required during a condensed period. Our cross-party Steering Group has been established to oversee and shape the Member Development Programme and representatives will champion and promote learning and development opportunities among their respective political groups.

Following the local elections in May 2023 we provided a comprehensive Member Induction Programme for all Members. Many opportunities arose from delivering training and support at a large scale, including some learning points, particularly with regard to the types of learning available and adapting training and guidance to suit Members with all levels of understanding and experience.

One of our key pledges is to ensure that all Councillors receive the support and help that they need to succeed in their roles, and we will ensure that equality of access to development and training remains a guiding principle.



Councillor Terry Richardson
Leader of the Council and
Portfolio Holder

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Councillor Adrian Clifford
Chairman of the Member
Development Steering Group

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Foreword from the Chief Executive

All councillors, whether newly elected, or with many years of experience have a duty to their communities, the Council and themselves to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to carry out their wide ranging and fast changing roles as effectively as possible.

This Strategy seeks to reaffirm the principles by which future Member Development will be determined and delivered and will assist Members in providing strong leadership for both the Council and improving services for our communities over the coming years.

Our commitment to equipping Members with the skills to contribute to the development of our District is directly reflected in both the Council's Corporate Priorities and the Council's Corporate Values. **(insert further detail here)**

We will share our learning & development opportunities with third parties, in addition, where appropriate, we will extend opportunities to local councillors who are Members of the town and parish councils in the District.



Julia Smith
Chief Executive

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1. Purpose and Aims

This Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to supporting Members with their development and details how we will equip elected representatives with the skills and knowledge they need to fulfil their various roles effectively and to the best of their abilities. It identifies how

1. We identify development needs;
2. The ways in which Members can participate in continuous learning and development
3. How we will evaluate and measure the success of learning.

The Member Development Strategy will closely align to the Council's Corporate Plan and People Strategy, we will endeavour to ensure that our learning and development programmes are linked to these Corporate Priorities:

(Insert new priorities here: currently Live, Work and Visit)

Elected Members have a critical role in delivering these priorities by demonstrating their understanding of the complex challenges faced by modern local government and supporting their communities.

Access to strong and effective Member development is essential to help Members fulfil their role and will strengthen the process for good decision making.

The aims of the Strategy are to help Members develop and strengthen their awareness, knowledge and understanding of:

- Local and national challenges and opportunities for the District
- Complex issues facing local government with changes to legislation; changing governance structures in associated bodies and a different funding environment
- The skills and competencies needed by elected Members in the modern world, including effective communications, community leadership and digital competencies.

To deliver these objectives Blaby District Council will demonstrate its commitment to Member Development by:

- Promoting the purpose and importance of councillor development and ensure buy-in from all levels of councillors and officers.
- Fostering and supporting a Member led approach.
- Supporting a positive and inclusive culture of learning, development and continual improvement.
- Developing and delivering (with Member involvement) an effective Learning & Development Programme.
- Taking a planned and strategic approach to Member Development.
- Assisting Members to develop their capacity to fulfil their role by providing role profiles.
- Providing additional officer support for Portfolio Holders and Chairs of Committees.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the training programme to ensure continuous improvement.
- Evaluation and reporting of the effectiveness of Members in their roles in relation to the Council's values and Performance Framework.
- Providing a budget and facilities for training and development
- Celebrating achievements and impact.
- Maintaining an effective Member Development Steering Group.

Insert Quote/Case Study to demonstrate benefits and impact.

2. Equality of Opportunity

As a public body we are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty and Blaby District Council is committed to the principle of equality in their learning and development programmes for all Members, irrespective of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, dependents, sexual orientation, marital status or working pattern.

Access to Learning and Development

All Members will be given access to development opportunities that enhance the skills and knowledge that they need both now and in the future. They will be offered support to facilitate their continual personal development, to enable them to contribute effectively to the achievement of the Council's priorities and respond to the changing needs of the District's diverse communities.

Care will be taken to identify and remove disadvantages or barriers that Members feel prevent them from taking advantage of these opportunities. In practice this means making sure that there are no physical, social, religious or cultural barriers. Where possible the Council will support Members to develop skills and knowledge that will be useful to them in preparation for enhanced roles.

Enabling Members to attend events and undertake learning and development activities is a key priority. In order to facilitate this:

- Formal sessions will be programmed in advance to try to ensure that they do not clash with the committee cycle and other major Council events.
- Activities will be programmed at different times of the day to accommodate individual commitments where possible.
- Alternative learning materials and other new technology will be used where appropriate.
- Council has made provision for a Dependants Carers' Allowance within its Members' Allowances Scheme to provide assistance for those Members with caring responsibilities to attend learning events.
- Appropriate consideration and access to learning will be given to Members with different needs and disabilities.

The Member Development Steering Group will regularly review the dates, times and location of all events and make recommendations for change if required.

3. Ethical Standards

Members must abide by the [Council's Code of Conduct](#) upon signing their declaration of acceptance of office, which includes a commitment to upholding the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) also known as the Nolan Principles:

1. Selflessness – holder of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest

2. Integrity – Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

3. Objectivity – Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability – Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

5. Openness – Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

6. Honesty – Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

The Council will support Members to uphold the Code of Conduct by:

1. Ensuring Members are fully briefed about their roles and responsibilities.
2. Providing ongoing training, advice and guidance to Members in respect of ethical matters.
3. Facilitating training through different methods, ensuring support and advice is available.

4. Members' Responsibilities and Commitments

All elected Members need to recognise the requirements to develop and maintain their skills and competencies and will be expected to meet their responsibilities towards the Council's priorities in the following ways:

Newly elected Members and returning members will participate in the full induction programme.

All Members will attend training and briefings on a range of relevant local and national issues

Completing pre and post training evaluation of courses and where useful providing feedback on briefings.

Sharing learning (through SharePoint, cascading information through training sessions and as part of the regular Member Development updates to Council).

Participate in specific training and development sessions related to their Cabinet and committee roles, including Licensing and Planning, where compliance is a Constitutional or legal requirement before Members can serve on these committees.

All Members will participate in training on the Council's Code of Conduct.

Supporting each other through mentoring and advice.

Create a diverse sharing and learning environment irrespective of the Political Parties.

5. The Member Development Steering Group

Blaby District Council's Member Development Steering Group ('the Steering Group') is a cross party working group that meets regularly throughout the year, with further meetings for specific sub groups. The Terms of Reference for the Steering Group are contained within Part 3 of the Constitution. Membership is reviewed annually and appointed by Council.

Members have considered and guided the development of this Strategy. They have provided valuable insight into the development and formation of the Councillor Development Review (CDR) that will provide the foundation for Member training over the course of this Council.

Cross-party representatives on the Steering Group will champion and promote learning and development opportunities among their respective political groups.

Our thanks and acknowledgement go to the Member Development Steering Group Members of 2023-24 for their hard work in developing this Strategy:

- Councillor Adrian Clifford (Chairman)
- Councillor Matt Tomeo (Vice-Chairman)
- Councillor Royston Bayliss
- Councillor Nick Brown
- Councillor Luke Cousin
- Councillor Susan Findlay
- Councillor Dillan Shikotra
- Councillor Bob Waterton
- Councillor Jane Wolfe

Insert Quote/Case Study to demonstrate benefits and impact.

Member Development Charter

Blaby District Council was the first local authority in Leicestershire to be awarded Charter status for its Member Development work in 2010 and is very proud of its Charter achievements. There is a requirement for an authority to seek reaccreditation every three years. Blaby District Council retained its accredited status in November 2013 and then again in 2016.

Due to the Covid Pandemic progress on reaccreditation was paused, going forward an important role for the Steering Group is to ensure that the Council maintains the standards required for Chartered status and to consider reaccreditation as part of its work programme.

Members' Roles and Responsibilities

Member role profiles were developed and used by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) to underpin the Members' Allowance Scheme. They were developed as a means to clearly set out the expectations of a ward Councillor and all roles attracting a 'Special Responsibility Allowance' (SRA). They have been refined and amended since, to ensure that they reflect the roles and responsibilities that our Councillors need on behalf of the public they are elected to serve.

The role profiles have three main purposes:

1. To provide clarity for Councillors, officers and the public about what is expected of each role;
2. To provide guidance to the Independent Remuneration Panel for the Members' Allowance Scheme;
3. To support Councillors in their development by providing a checklist to identify their development needs, both for the roles they are currently undertaking and for future roles to support succession planning.

The role profiles set out the role and responsibilities as well as the skills and knowledge required for each role. The role profile for the ward Councillor is the foundation for all other roles. The responsibilities, skills and knowledge required for roles attracting an SRA are in addition to those set out for the ward Councillor.

There has been consultation with Councillors and key officers to ensure the role profiles were updated to reflect the changing role of Councillors and the future needs of the council and local government. In addition to this, skills and knowledge for each role have been identified to both meet the requirements of a future allowance scheme and support the Member Development Programme.

The roles and responsibilities have been attached as an appendix to this Strategy. The Member Development Steering Group has delegated authority to make amendments to the roles and responsibilities for the term of the Strategy.

6. The Member Development Programme

Four Year Cycle

The Member Development Programme is based on a four-year cycle that is in line with Blaby District Council's election cycle. This approach also has the flexibility to meet the needs of new Members joining the Council (through by-elections) and the considerable experience of Members with long service. The Programme will be monitored and evaluated throughout the cycle to ensure it keeps pace with new priorities and initiatives.

Learning & Development Key Themes

The majority of learning and development themes are relevant to all Members, for example:

- New or changing legislation
- Core skills such as community leadership
- Major policy or service delivery changes by the Council.

Other opportunities will be relevant to specific roles (for example Cabinet Members, Committee Chair or Scrutiny). Members will also have their own individual learning needs.

The Programme will be delivered through three key themes - Core Knowledge and Skills, Service Specific Opportunities and Council & Committee learning. Each 'theme' is reflected to varying degrees in the four year approach which matches the election cycle and as such looks back as well as forward for the purposes of this Strategy:

- Year one (2023/24) is focused on induction to provide Members with the skills and knowledge needed to understand and fulfil their role.
- Year two - three (2025/26) will focus on enhancing Members' competencies and knowledge.
- Year four (2026/27) Identifying skills and development needs for succession planning and preparation for induction and mentoring of new Members.

Further detail of three themes is provided below:

1. Core knowledge and skills	2. Service specific opportunities	3. Council and Committee learning
• Democracy and governance i.e. how Council decision-making works and organisational awareness. • The legal and constitutional framework • Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion • IT skills, media and communications • Managing case work/ward work • Code of conduct and probity • Safeguarding • Dealing with complaints • Local government finance • General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) • Freedom of Information • Risk and resilience planning • Partnership working and structures • Corporate plans (e.g. Commercial Strategy, Economic Development Strategy) • Personal Safety	Masterclasses and Briefings on the work of individual services and emerging issues that affect specific service delivery. Examples of this include changes to: • Welfare Reform • Planning • Housing • Local Plan	• Planning Committee • Licensing and Regulatory Committee • Audit & Corporate Governance responsibilities • Scrutiny skills • Sitting on appeals panels • Recruitment and interviewing skills • Evaluating reports and framing questions • Specific training for the Council's Executive (Portfolio holders) and chairs of committees

Councillor Development Review (CDR)

The foundation of the Member Development Programme is a robust evaluation of training needs which are matched to council priorities and are clearly based on role profiles for elected Members.

Every 12 to 18 months Members are invited to attend a Councillor Development Review (CDR) with their group whip and where requested, a support officer from Democratic Services. Where there is a Member who is a single representative they will have the opportunity to discuss development needs with an officer from Democratic Services. These sessions provide the opportunity for an open and reflective dialogue to identify training and development needs and a discussion on Members' interests and ambitions relative to their Council roles. These sessions also provide an opportunity to match Members for peer-to-peer mentoring and enable group whips to consider succession planning.

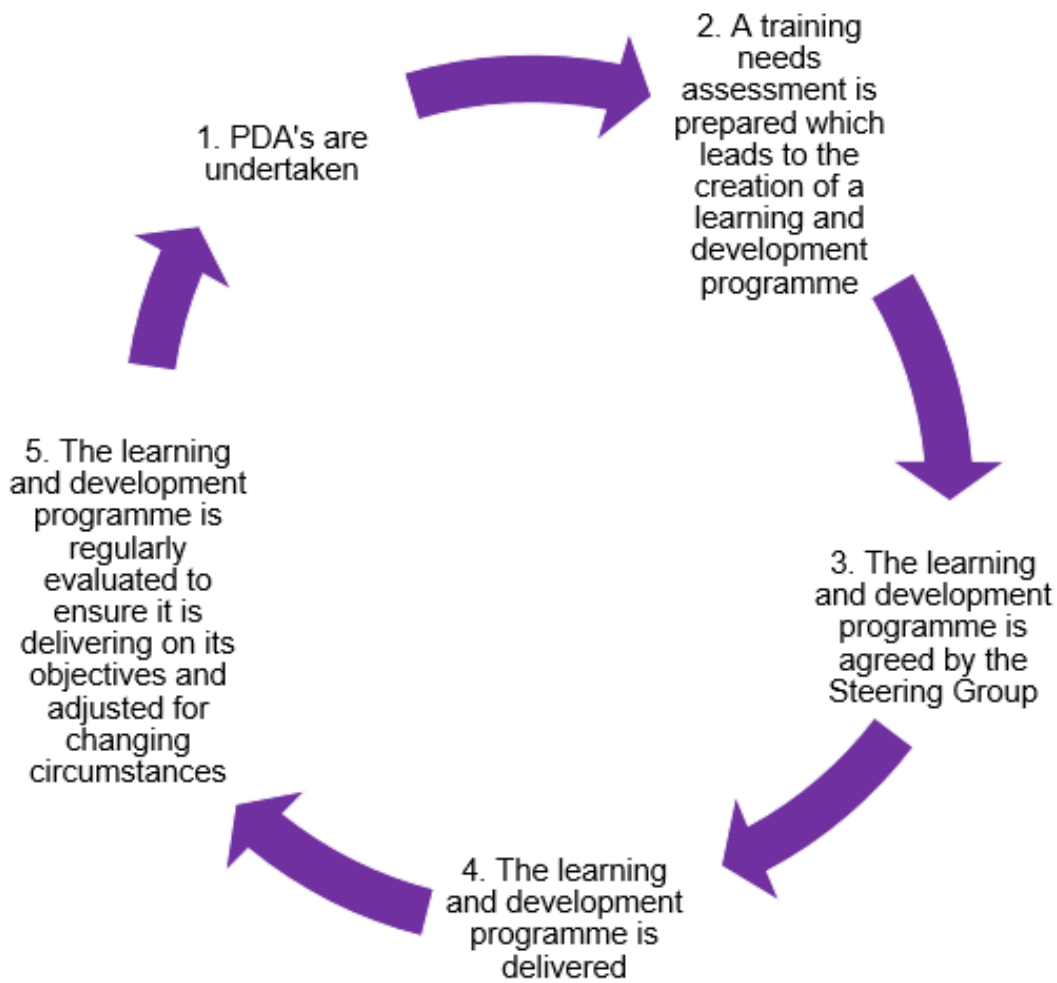
Timings:

- An election year is considered to be year one in the cycle and PDAs will be completed between 12 and 18 months following the election. This enables the completion of the Induction Programme and is timely to plan for the Programme of Learning for years 2 and 3.
- A second PDA will follow during year 3, again between November and February. This will involve a review of the learning undertaken to date as well as an opportunity to identify further training needs and assistance to Group Leaders for identification of successors to key roles.
- The completed Training Needs Assessment Summary will be shared with the Member Development Steering Group, who will guide the development of a Learning & Development Programme.
- This programme will be agreed with the Steering Group.

The Plan will then be delivered and regularly evaluated by the Steering Group.

The continuous cycle of appraisal, establishing training needs, development, delivery and evaluation is illustrated below:

Insert Quote/Case Study to demonstrate benefits and impact.



Delivering the Programme

The Group recognises that learning and development must be delivered in ways that encourage Member involvement and generate strong Member participation. Opportunities will, where possible, be tailored to reflect different personal and domestic circumstances and preferred learning styles, for example:

Masterclasses and Briefings	Conferences, seminars, and network meetings	E-learning (iLearn and other platforms)
Visits to neighbouring and other authorities	Peer coaching and mentoring	Voluntary sector and partner organisations
SharePoint: access to the Members Toolkit, a range of council related information and articles, and Members own views on training.		Virtual, hybrid or in-person sessions

Resourcing the Programme

People:

The Member Development Programme is supported by Council Officers who are regularly involved in delivering the programme.

The Democratic Services Team support the Member Development Steering Group in providing advice and guidance:

Katie Brooman – Elections
and Governance Manager

Sandeep Tiensa
Senior Democratic Services &
Scrutiny Officer

Nicole Cramp – Democratic
Services & Scrutiny Officer

Isaac Thomas – Democracy
Support Officer

I.T:

I.T provision is critical in delivering the Member Development Programme and providing support to all Members in their role.

All Members are offered a laptop with the Microsoft 365 suite of applications, including Teams and SharePoint.

The Council uses Modern.Gov (Civica) which supports paperless working, reducing the Council's environmental impact. The paperless meeting app ensures Members have quick access to important information.

The Steering Group recognise the importance of accessing training, so many sessions are delivered virtually or hybrid. Additional support, if required, may be provided by Democratic Services and the Council's I.T support team.

Finance:

An annual budget is allocated for Member Development each year. Expenditure is monitored by the Steering Group and Democratic Services. The budget is considered at each meeting of the Steering Group and when preparing the budget, advice will be sought from the Group on funding needs. Authorisation to attend any learning or development opportunities (which incur a cost) will need to be granted in advance by a senior officer in Democratic Services. Subject to budget availability, authorisation will be granted if the opportunity is included within the approved programme or is directly related to any an individual Member's identified training needs. Should a Member wish to undertake training outside of these parameters, then approval from the group whip and Director will be needed.

Promoting Learning and Development Opportunities

Opportunities for learning & development will be:

- Added to the calendar on the Members SharePoint site.
- Emailed to Councillors with relevant details, including how the training links to the Corporate Plan Priorities, followed by a calendar invitation for Outlook.
- Circulated monthly to all Councillors in the Member Development Programme update.
- Included in the Weekly Meetings Diary

Members will also be encouraged to feedback on each learning opportunity undertaken and an update on courses undertaken and forthcoming opportunities will be given on a six-monthly basis to full council to provide a formal opportunity to share learning.

Support for Prospective Councillors

Councillors make a huge difference to the quality of life of local people and how local issues are dealt with. The Council is keen to attract people from all different backgrounds to become Councillors. The Council will hold information events with elected Members providing their own valuable experiences. Senior officers and Democratic and Electoral services will provide Prospective Councillor information packs, detailing key dates, opportunities to observe council committees and signposting to [Be a Councillor Campaign](#).

Support for new Members

In addition to the induction programme, new Members will be assigned a 'buddy'. 'Buddies' may range from the Democratic Services team to members of the Senior Leadership Team. In all instances an officer buddy will act as their mentor to provide signposting and guidance.

An informal 'catch-up' will take place with all new Members six months after they are elected and then again at 12 months to share experiences and inform future induction programmes.

By-elections

When Members join the Council because of a by-election, Democratic Services will arrange a tailored induction programme that introduces the varied elements of the year 1 programme. They will ensure adequate mentoring support is available to ensure new Members do not feel 'adrift'. Opportunities to observe committees and regular 'catch-up's will be planned.

Advanced Member Development Programme for Members of the Council's Cabinet Executive, Opposition Leaders, and Committee Chairs

It is essential that targeted development opportunities are provided for senior Members who may be currently part of the Council's Cabinet Executive or have the potential and ambition to join the Cabinet. This small team of Members provide the direction and leadership of the Council, and their skills needs to be enhanced and refreshed to ensure they can deliver and embrace the challenges faced by local government.

In addition to and separate from the Member Development Programme, Cabinet Members will also be provided with a Cabinet specific induction session facilitated by the Chief Executive and Corporate Services Group Manager.

Succession planning is essential to the smooth running of the council and to facilitate part of this, Portfolio Holders, Opposition Leaders, and Chairs of key committees will be involved in learning opportunities for Members who wish to develop their role at Blaby.

As part of this work, senior Members will be encouraged to contribute to the learning experiences for newer Members and where appropriate share their skills and experience with them. Suitable opportunities will be sought through the Local Government Association's Leadership Academy, East Midlands Councils, and other Partners.

Insert Quote/Case Study to demonstrate benefits and impact.

7. Evaluation of Learning

Effective evaluation needs to be an integral part of any learning and development programme. The objective for member development is to ensure that we support Members, and give them the tools to ensure they are:

- **Informed** and able to contribute to the delivery of the council's priorities:
 - A Place to Live
 - A Place to Work
 - A Place to Visit
- **Skilled** to effectively fulfil any of their committee or leadership roles:
 - Using the role profiles and specific requirements for individual committees or work on outside bodies
- **Confident** in their ability to fulfil their role as a ward member and community champion:
 - Using the role profiles as the basis for this work.
 - Using the Councillor Development Review Plan to identify any gaps in future learning.

Training will be systematically evaluated, and the Steering Group will be directly involved in encouraging feedback and considering evaluation from training opportunities. Their views will shape and determine the content of future Member Development Programmes.

Value for Money

Member development must also provide value for money (VfM) and this is measured by the cost, effectiveness and relevance of training provided to ensure that it meets both Members individual requirements and the Council's strategic priorities.

The Member Development Steering Group reports to Council twice a year, future reports will include assessments of VfM.

The support of the Member Development Steering Group (MDSG), Group Leaders and Whips is essential to secure Members buy-in and therefore their active participation in evaluation.

Insert Quote/Case Study to demonstrate benefits and impact

Stages of Evaluation

Stage 1 - An evaluation of a Members learning needs. The Councillor Development Review (CDR) will ascertain these needs and aid succession planning.



Stage 2 - Preparation of Member Development Programme incorporating Council priorities and individual learning needs.



Stage 3 - Pre-Evaluation Form - Before any course or learning opportunity Members will be asked to complete a simple and short pre-evaluation form.



Stage 4 - Post-Session Evaluation Form - Within two weeks of each briefing, course or learning opportunity, Members will be asked to complete an evaluation of the content and the trainer.



Stage 5 - Three to Six Month Evaluation Form - Four months after each course or learning opportunity we will ask Members to complete a post-training evaluation form that will focus on how they have been able to put the learning into practice. Where possible we will use examples that may be shared across the Council and put into case studies.



Stage 6 - The Steering Group will consider the evaluation forms and assessments of VfM every quarter and make recommendations from this on future learning opportunities. This will inform the annual programme of learning and development opportunities. The Steering Group will also evaluate the effectiveness of the forms used and make amendments where required.

8. Appendices and Supporting Documents

- Members Roles and Responsibilities

The following documents have not been attached, but will be used by the Member Development Steering Group to support its work:

1. Councillor Development Review Form
2. Member Development Programme
3. Evaluation forms
4. Value for Money Matrix