

Councillor Development Strategy 2023/27



CONTENTS

1. Introduction	2
2. The Purpose: why we need a Councillor Development Strategy	3
3. Our Vision and our Aims: Learning to develop excellence for all	4
4. Resources	5
5. Our Priorities	7
6. Our Council Values	8
7. How we will implement the Strategy	10
8. How we will deliver Development, Measure Success and Monitor Progress	11



WOW! Wyre's Corporate Values

Introduction

Wyre's cross-party Councillor Development Group has committed to and fully endorses this updated and refreshed four year Councillor Development Strategy for the coming 2023-27 term of office under our adopted banner of "learning to develop excellence".

Councillors are at the very heart of everything that the council does and it is essential that we encourage councillors to develop their skills and knowledge to their full potential to achieve our aims and strategic objectives to deliver high-quality services for Wyre residents.

In recent years, local government has faced a series of enormous challenges and councils have undergone numerous transformations as they continue to embrace new and emergent technologies. To enable our councillors to adapt to new challenges as and when they arise, we must ensure that we keep the learning and development needs of elected members under regular review so that they can continue to fulfil the roles and responsibilities as community leaders.

Together we make a difference

In implementing this strategy, Wyre Council will be working to support its councillors and make sure that they have the learning opportunities they need to perform effectively in their roles and meet all the challenges that the future will bring.

1. The Purpose: why we need a Councillor Development Strategy

The Strategy is the framework that illustrates how the council will provide councillor learning and development. It sets out our key objectives in broad terms and states how we intend to achieve them. This updated Strategy for 2023-27 refreshes and reiterates our continuing commitment to councillor development.

The council first adopted a strategy in 2003 shortly after signing up to the principles of the North West Charter for Elected Member Development, which established the foundation on which Wyre has been building ever since to develop our councillors and provide ongoing support.

In subsequent years, Wyre achieved the necessary requirements of the Charter and went on to achieve the Exemplar standard for Elected Member Development - Charter Level 2 - an accolade received by only a handful of councils. To ensure that Wyre continues to maintain those exacting standards we are committed to refreshing the Strategy every four years, prior to each “all out” election.

Doing so helps us to sustain the exceptionally high standard of councillor development opportunities commensurate with the Charter, for which the council will be reassessed. This 2023 update confirms how we will maintain our commitment to learning to build and develop excellence in our councillors and to support our reassessment evidence.



The newly refreshed 2023/27 Strategy, founded once again upon our adopted mission statement of learning to develop excellence, will continue to build upon existing foundations. It describes how we will work together make a difference for our councillors so that they will help the council achieve the vision set out in the Business Plan.

2. Our Vision and our Aims: learning to develop excellence for all

This Strategy provides the framework for a training and development programme that will continue to be innovative as well as identifying and incorporating best practice from other sources.

Our ambition is to develop excellence within all councillors by providing the opportunities for them to improve themselves so that they can perform to their highest possible standard and encouraging them to take advantage of the learning and development opportunities.

Our plan is to find and utilise the finest examples of training and development opportunities for councillors nationally and internationally and to show that we have the ambition to build excellence into our development programme and training opportunities. This will ensure that all our elected members have the means to develop themselves towards excellence, which will result in knowledgeable, motivated and highly skilled councillors who are fully equipped and confident to carry out their roles effectively.

Encouraging residents to become councillors

We will regularly promote the process of becoming a councillor and publicise what being a councillor involves via the council's website so that any Wyre resident who may wish to stand for election is aware of the process and the commitment. We may also provide training sessions and briefings for candidates in the run up to local elections and will inform all candidates of the event well in advance to ensure that any independent candidates have the same opportunity to attend the sessions as the candidates from political parties.

Equality of opportunity

Wyre Council is committed to providing equal opportunities and promoting diversity and will ensure that there is access to learning and development opportunities for all our councillors, irrespective of:

- political affiliation or independence,
- number of years' service as a councillor,
- seniority,
- age,
- disability,
- gender or gender reassignment,
- marital or partnership status,
- pregnancy and maternity,
- race,
- nationality (including citizenship),
- ethnic or national origins,
- religion, including lack of religion,
- belief, including lack of belief,
- sex or sexual orientation.

We will provide any councillors with specific needs (for example, a physical disability) with essential support that will enable them to participate in the learning programme. A Carer's and Dependent Person's Allowance may be claimed in accordance with our approved scheme for attendance at learning and development events.

3. Resources

Responsible Officer

The council recognises that councillor development is vital to the council's success and has appointed an officer from the Democratic Services Team with this specific responsibility to coordinate councillor development.

Councillor Development Group (CDG)

The council established a cross party CDG in 2003 to maintain a member forum to ensure that the ongoing development programme remains councillor-led with professional advice being provided by the CDO.

Councillor Development Programme ("the Programme")

The Programme reflects the values and principles set out in the Wyre's Business Plan and specific learning objectives within "four stages of development" (designated as basics, competence, accomplishment and grandmaster). Whatever stage in development a councillor has attained, we will provide, within the constraints of the budget, all possible resources to provide them with learning and development events so that they gain the necessary skills and knowledge to progress and deliver the high quality and best value services to residents that the council needs.

The learning and development programme is designed to have sufficient flexibility to ensure that it covers identified current requirements on an ongoing basis and is able to respond to new issues as and when they arise. This is likely to include an increased focus on climate change issues to ensure that the council is taking positive action to address the climate emergency.

The 21st Century Councillor - the programme has taken into account many of the findings of the 21st Century Councillor joint report by North West Employers and University of Birmingham, which was a call to action for councils to rethink the role of elected members. The report covered the range of roles that the 21st Century Councillor is required to perform, the competencies and skills that councillors need to undertake these roles and the support and training requirements for these roles.



Wyre Councillor Skills Framework

The council has developed a Framework (included as the Appendix of the Programme), setting out the roles and responsibilities of all councillors and specific councillor positions. The CDG will review the Framework when appropriate to ensure that it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

We will deliver a range of development activities and provide sufficient training to give all councillors the opportunity to build their skills and knowledge to a level that is in keeping with the varied roles and responsibilities as set out in the Framework. This includes the practical skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively as a ward councillor.

We will provide councillors with development support in their broader role as community representatives as well as specific training opportunities designed to help them to fulfil their scrutiny, regulatory and other committee roles.

We will also provide support and development opportunities for leadership roles, including Chairmen and Executive/Portfolio Holder roles as appropriate.

New Councillor Induction

The council has developed an induction process for newly elected councillors to ensure that they receive sufficient training following their election to enable them to contribute and participate as a councillor as quickly as possible. This includes mandatory Code of Conduct training for all councillors. We review the induction materials every time a by election is held and thus make continuous improvements to the new councillors' induction process. From 2023, councillors have been able to access the Induction material on the Councillor Portal, which is available on the council's Intranet and Extranet.

Mentors

Where possible, political groups should ensure that mentoring from experienced councillors is available to newer councillors within their groups. The council also encourages more experienced councillors to share their expertise with those taking up new roles and responsibilities irrespective of whether they share the same political affiliation. Councillors are encouraged to take advantage of any mentoring opportunities offered both inside and outside the council. For example, an experienced Chair at another authority may be willing to mentor a new Chair in Wyre.

The councillor development budget

The council has allocated an annual budget of £6,000 for councillor development for the years 2023/27 to cover the needs of all 50 councillors and the CDO will manage the allocation of those funds to ensure that the budget is spent effectively. If necessary, the CDO may need to consult with relevant directors and the CDG.

Personal responsibility

The council expects that councillors will take personal responsibility to ensure their own continuous professional personal development and to develop their knowledge and skills as a councillor throughout their term of office.

4. Our Priorities

Wyre Council recognises the significant role of councillors in improving services and identifying and delivering better value for money. To achieve this, elected members must have the necessary skills and knowledge to take the crucial decisions that affect the lives and well-being of the residents of Wyre, the employers based in Wyre and the visitors to Wyre.

Newly elected councillors - Induction

We will continue to provide all newly elected councillors with a full programme of induction training, including a mandatory briefing on the council's Code of Conduct.

Regulatory

Members of the regulatory bodies of the council whether new to the committees or experience, will be required to attend appropriate training sessions or otherwise demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge before they are allowed to participate in hearings, inquiries or decisions that will affect the rights of an individual. In addition, all councillors are required to attend Treasury Management training, with a particular emphasis on Overview and Scrutiny members who have the oversight for this function.

Identifying the needs of councillors

Councillors will have differing needs and the identification of those needs will continue to take place in an atmosphere of confidentiality. We will undertake a thorough review of councillor development needs in the months following the May 2023 election to assess the training and development requirements of the new intake of councillors and those who have been re-elected and there will be an extensive programme of training and development for Members.

We will identify councillors' individual development requirements through the completion of an online Strengths and Development Record questionnaire and will review needs throughout the term of office. We expect all elected members to review their individual Strengths and Development Record regularly to promote a lifelong learning culture throughout the council. All councillors are thus able to inform us of any areas in which they would like to improve their skills and knowledge. A Knowledge and Skills record, supported by a self-assessment tool, is also required for all councillors in relation to Treasury Management. We will identify the overall training and development priorities for members by collating the Strengths and Development Record responses and any other self-assessments and this will form the basis of the ongoing programme of training events.

Providing the learning and development opportunities

We will provide all necessary development opportunities in line with the priorities identified by the Strengths and Development Record questionnaires and within the resources available.

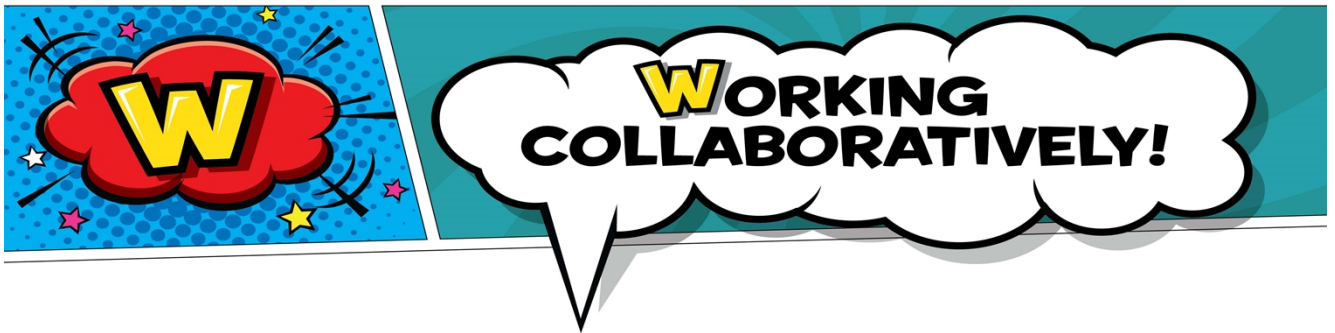
We will provide councillors with support in the use of ICT systems so that councillors can access all necessary information, participate effectively in paperless meetings, webinars and training sessions and can communicate effectively using electronic media in line with emergent technology including social media, videoconferencing, virtual meetings, etc.

We will provide regular in-house training events as well as opportunities to attend external events, including virtual and e-Learning courses where appropriate and affordable.

Keeping councillors informed

The responsible officer and the CDG will continue to provide regular advice and information to councillors about learning and development opportunities through the Councillor Portal, the calendar on the website, promotional posters and emails.

5. Our Council Values



Wherever possible, we will work in partnership with neighbouring and other local authorities as well as other relevant organisations to share best practice and share the cost of councillor development. Where appropriate we may offer places on our own in-house courses to councillors from other authorities. This may involve a cost to the other authorities or when appropriate could be provided on a reciprocal basis.

The North West Councillor Development Network holds meetings (usually virtually) every 3-4 months to

- provide updates on legislation and how we can keep councillors informed,
- share ideas, best practice and case studies of what other authorities are doing,
- circulate and disseminate resources.

The responsible officer regularly attends the Network meetings and any other interested Wyre councillors are welcome to attend. It is not necessary to be a member of the CDG to do so. The meeting dates, times and joining instructions of upcoming meetings are publicised in the agendas and minutes of the CDG.



Wyre Council is committed to continuous improvement, innovation and best value and aims to encourage both councillors and council employees to develop themselves to their full potential.

Councillors have responsibility for decisions on how the council's budgets are spent and those decisions have major impacts on many thousands of residents, companies based in the borough and visitors to the area.

Despite this, there is no requirement for any formal qualification to be a councillor so the council recognises that our elected members must have every opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to help them provide the best possible services for the people of Wyre. All our councillors must be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil their important and often complex role in representing the wider community, influencing council policy and working together with council officers to achieve shared goals.

Continuous professional development is vital for our councillors and officers and we will do everything in our power to update their knowledge and learn the new skills that they will need to enable them to play an effective role in local government in the 21st century.

It is essential that we continue to support and develop our councillors and, where possible, retain those councillors who have taken advantage of the development opportunities offered



Wherever possible, we will provide the majority of councillor training sessions using our own council officers who can often provide in-house expertise, and by cost sharing with neighbouring authorities.

For some essential learning sessions, in-house expertise will not be available to us and we will endeavour to procure the best possible external providers from a variety of sources, within the available budget.

Wyre Council recognises the need for a value for money approach to councillor development and we will endeavour to source the most suitable and best value facilitators for learning sessions and briefings. These may include the following external bodies and others:

- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Local Government Information Unit (LGiU)
- Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
- North West Employers
- Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA),
- Institute of Licensing (IoL)
- Counter Terrorism Policing North West (CTPNW)
- Lancashire County Council (LCC).

Attendance at the briefings and courses that we provide will not necessarily suit everyone all the time. The council recognises that individuals learn in very different ways and that some councillors' development needs may be better served through other learning methods such as books, open learning, multimedia and digital learning resources including e-learning, webinars, video and audio.

The responsible officer will maintain a database of suitable training providers and, where possible, procure any appropriate learning materials for the Members' Library.

6. How we will implement the Strategy

We expect each individual councillor to take personal responsibility for his or her own learning and self-development and attendance at the majority of learning and development events will be voluntary. Exceptions to this will include training on the Code of Conduct, Treasury Management and GDPR (data protection). Mandatory training will also be required for those councillors sitting on the regulatory bodies of the council and all councillors must be proficient in digital communications and cyber security in line with the council's aim to deliver all services digitally by 31 March 2027.

Councillors on regulatory / quasi-judicial committees

If adequate training has not been provided/received before conducting hearings and inquiries and/or making decisions of a regulatory or quasi-judicial nature, those decisions could be subject to a legal challenge. It is essential that the councillors who are members of those bodies are fully briefed and have received all the necessary training.

We will provide specific training for members of the council's regulatory bodies: Planning Committee, Licensing Committee, Audit Committee and Standards Committee (hearings). Members appointed to any of the regulatory bodies listed above must be able to either demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge and/or attend the appropriate briefings and learning sessions provided before they may participate in any *hearing, inquiry or decision that will affect the rights of an individual*. This also includes any Appeals Panel convened to hear an appeal from a council employee under Stage 3 of the Grievance Procedure. It is not necessary to be a member of the Employment and Appeals Committee for this; any councillor can undertake the necessary training.

Councillor Development Group (CDG)

The CDG represent the views of members in all aspects of development for councillors and will meet quarterly or more often if required to monitor and evaluate the implementation, quality and take-up of councillor development activities.

The CDG are involved in the preparation and approval of councillor development strategies and programmes and will support and encourage councillors in the identification of their development needs and the take up of learning opportunities.

Whenever conflicting demands involving the prioritisation and allocation of the training budget arise, the CDG, or if no meeting is imminent, the Chair of the CDG and/or the director with responsibility for the councillor development budget may provide advice.

Democratic Services Team

The Democratic Services team will support councillors' learning and development by:

- devising and delivering a programme of induction training for new councillors,
- identifying and assessing members' needs via annual Strengths and Development Records,
- devising a comprehensive learning and development programme for councillors, based on essential requirements and needs identified,
- ensuring that all councillors are made aware of learning and development opportunities and co-ordinating development opportunities for councillors,
- maintaining a record of all councillors' attendance at learning events,

- the Councillor Portal on the Intranet/Extranet which has a dedicated Member Training page with past presentations, induction material and more.

7. How we will deliver the Development, Measure Success and Monitor Progress

We are committed to ensuring that the learning and development opportunities provided are meeting the needs of councillors and achieving value for money.

Initial indicators of success will be

- the ability of our councillors to perform effectively in all their roles,
- the involvement of all or the majority of councillors in the completion of Strengths and Development Records in order to identify key development needs.

The CDG were instrumental in developing and approving this Strategy and in future years, the group will be involved in ensuring its delivery, the subsequent review of the Strategy and Programme and the ongoing determination of priorities.

As appropriate, the CDG will seek and consider feedback on courses that councillors have attended and will evaluate and monitor participation in and the cost of learning events and the impact on and funds remaining in the development budget.

In the short term, we will measure progress by

- councillors' engagement and continued participation in development activities,
- satisfactory levels of councillor attendance at the learning events provided,
- councillor feedback indicating that the development events provided are suitable,
- training evaluation responses that substantiate that sessions are useful and rewarding.

In the medium term, after we have identified our councillors' needs, improvements in councillors' skills and knowledge should become evident when reviews of the Strengths and Development Records take place.

The wider long-term aim of this Strategy is to see improvements in services and value for money for the residents of Wyre. We are confident that increased knowledge and skills of our councillors will support our aim to develop excellence, which will in turn produce better services for residents. Part of the role of the CDG will be to assess the beneficial impacts that the training has had on both councillors and the council.