



Report of:	Meeting	Date
Councillor Michael Vincent, Leader of the Council, and Clare James, Director of Finance and Governance	Council	18 April 2024

Councillor Development Strategy 2024-2028, Councillor Development Programme 2024/25 and Wyre Councillor Skills Framework

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1** To present the Councillor Development Strategy 2024-2028, the Councillor Development Programme 2024/25, and the Wyre Councillor Skills Framework, to Council for approval.

2. Council priorities

- 2.1** A well run, forward-thinking council that puts customers first.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1** That the proposed Councillor Development Strategy 2024-2028 be approved and the relevant Director continue to make appropriate arrangements for the provision of development opportunities for all councillors within the agreed budget.
- 3.2** That the proposed Councillor Development Programme 2024/25 be approved.
- 3.3** That the proposed Wyre Councillor Skills Framework be noted and endorsed.
- 3.4** That the Strengths and Development Questionnaire (SDQ) (pages 34-42 of the Strategy) be noted.
- 3.5** To recommend that we continue to ensure that development opportunities are relevant and available to all councillors. In order to achieve this, the SDQ is recommended to be made mandatory, and responses reviewed annually. Political group leaders are also asked to allocate senior members from their groups to act as mentors to more new councillors to assist in this process.

3.6 That members note the proposed objectives and action plan for member development (as set out in pages 7 - 12 of the Strategy) and work with the Councillor Development Group and relevant officers in achieving these objectives.

4. Background

4.1 In November 2023, the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council signed the North-West Charter for Elected Member Development Declaration, recommitting the council to the principles of the Charter in its bid to be awarded the Level 1 Review award for exemplary training.

4.2 One of the assessment criteria for the Level 1 Review award is having an up-to-date councillor development strategy which is refreshed annually.

4.3 In November 2023, the Full Council approved the new Council Plan 2024-2028.

4.4 It was noted that a refreshed Councillor Development Strategy was needed to match the new Council Plan period, strategic objectives as well as making sure that the council meets the assessment criteria for the Level 1 Review award.

4.5 In September 2023, the annual Strengths and Development Questionnaire (SDQ) was circulated to all members of the council, asking them to review their learning and development needs. Of the 50 members of the council, 29 responded to the survey. The top training priorities for 2024/25 were identified and have been used to create a training programme for the next municipal year.

4.6 In 2016, the Local Government Association and the University of Birmingham published the document titled "The 21st Century Councillor", establishing the new expectations placed on councillors and setting out their roles and responsibilities and how officers can support members to meet these challenges.

4.7 The Wyre Councillor Skills Framework has been updated to reflect changing expectations placed upon councillors and, reflected through the Councillor Development Strategy and Programme, how officers can best support members. It is proposed for this to be reviewed annually, along with the other documents, to ensure consistency.

4.8 On 18 March 2024, the Councillor Development Group endorsed the refreshed Councillor Development Strategy 2024-2028, Councillor Development Programme 2024/25, the Wyre Councillor Skills Framework and Strengths and Development Questionnaire.

5. Key issues and proposals

- 5.1** The Councillor Development Strategy 2024-2028 is the key strategic document which sets out the long-term plan of how the council will provide learning and development opportunities for councillors. It is proposed for this to be reviewed annually and refreshed every four years, to meet the assessment criteria for the North-West Elected Member Charter and to align training priorities with the council's priorities.
- 5.2** The Councillor Development Programme 2024/25 is the learning and development programme for that municipal year, taking into account the needs of members identified through the questionnaires, and other topics of focus discussed with officers. It is a flexible document that is designed to support both members and the wider council in meeting its learning and development objectives as set out in the strategy.
- 5.3** The Wyre Councillor Skills Framework sets out the roles and responsibilities of all members and all potential roles they may undertake within the council. The framework establishes the expectations of councillors at Wyre, and so works in conjunction with the strategy to influence the learning and development programme to identify further areas of support. It is proposed for this to be reviewed annually alongside the other documents to ensure any proposed training programme is relevant to the roles and responsibilities of members.
- 5.4** The Strengths and Development Questionnaire (SDQ) is part of the assessment criteria for the North-West Elected Member Charter; to help the council achieve its Level 1 Review award, there must be a process for members to review their learning and development needs annually, and for the data to then be reviewed by the Councillor Development Group. Given the relatively low rate of submission (58%) and how this might impact the award of the Level 1 Review, it is recommended that this exercise now be made mandatory to meet engagement requirements and to ensure that learning and development opportunities meet the needs of as many councillors as possible.
- 5.5** It is proposed that an updated Councillor Development Strategy, with clear expectations for councillors through the updated Wyre Councillor Skills Framework, and a training programme for 2024/25, will ensure that members are fully supported in their learning and development.

6. Alternative options considered and rejected

- 6.1** It was considered to not update the Councillor Development Strategy from 2023-2027. However, in order to meet the assessment criteria of the North-West Charter for Elected Member Development, it was necessary to incorporate updates.

- Similarly, it was considered not to refresh the Wyre Councillor Skills Framework.
- 6.2** However, it was necessary in order to ensure proper standards of training and to meet the assessment criteria for the North-West Charter for Elected Member Development.

6.3 It was necessary to create a new training programme for 2024/25, using the data from the SDQs; no other options were considered.

6.4 It was considered to continue to recommend that members submit the SDQ and to not make this mandatory. However, as this is a requirement of the North-West Elected Member Charter and owing to fewer than two thirds returning them, it has now been recommended to make this a mandatory requirement to enable officers to act on the needs of councillors as identified through the questionnaires.

Financial, Legal and Climate Change implications	
Finance	<p>A councillor development budget of £11,000 has been allocated for 2024/25. This includes an uplift of £1,500 approved as a growth bid during the Revised Estimate budget setting process to the 2023/24 base budget. It also includes £2,500 reallocated from existing budgets to increase the councillor development budget temporarily.</p> <p>Training and development facilitators will be chosen from a variety of sources as appropriate. This will include in-house training and briefing sessions, cost-sharing with neighbouring authorities as well as utilising external providers. It is intended that all costs will be met from the overall training budget and it is not envisaged that costs will exceed the budget provided. Should essential training be required that involves any costs over and above the budget allocated, these will normally be met from savings identified elsewhere.</p> <p>Any such issues will be fed into the process for the formulation of future budgets.</p>
Legal	<p>The provision of effective training will minimise the risk of illegal or ill-considered decision making. In particular, the Code of Conduct training provided to all councillors is mandatory.</p>
Climate Change	<p>There are no implications arising directly from this report. However, one of the objectives of the Councillor Development Strategy 2024–2028 is to encourage climate-friendly initiatives to match council priorities. In encouraging more climate-friendly training events, this may have an impact on the number of members travelling to training events, as well as encouraging members to be more thoughtful of this when taking decisions.</p>

Other risks/implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	x
equality and diversity	✓
health and safety	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
ICT	x
data protection	x

Processing Personal Data

In addition to considering data protection along with the other risks/ implications, the report author will need to decide if a 'privacy impact assessment (PIA)' is also required. If the decision(s) recommended in this report will result in the collection and processing of personal data for the first time (i.e. purchase of a new system, a new working arrangement with a third party) a PIA will need to have been completed and signed off by Data Protection Officer before the decision is taken in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

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List of background papers:		
name of document	date	where available for inspection
None.		

List of appendices

- Appendix 1 – Councillor Development Strategy 2024-2028**
- Appendix 2 – Councillor Development Programme 2024-25**
- Appendix 3 – Wyre Councillor Skills Framework**
- Appendix 4 – Strengths and Development Questionnaire**