

Together  
we make a  
difference

**COUNCILLOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY  
2024 - 2028**

LAST UPDATED: 07/02/2024

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Foreword from the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council	3
Introduction	4
Aims and Purpose	5
Action Plan	7
Delivery	13
Measuring Success	14
Resources	16
Councillor Skills Framework	18
Appendix	19

## FOREWORD FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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The way in which we work has changed profoundly over the last few years and national government has set some challenging targets for local authorities. At the same time, councils have undertaken a digital transformation that includes paperless meetings, hybrid work environments and remote working. Wyre Council has responded and adapted to these constantly changing circumstances and our councillors continue to make hugely important decisions on how to allocate a budget of many millions of pounds.

Anyone who is eligible to stand for election as a councillor may do so and, if they receive sufficient votes, can become an “elected member”. Councillors do not need any formal qualifications whatsoever and yet the decisions they make can have a significant impact on local people and their lives.

It is essential therefore that we provide our elected members with all the resources they need to develop themselves to their full potential. Doing this will help to ensure that they have all the necessary skills to allocate the council’s budget wisely and provide the best possible services for more than 110,000 Wyre residents, the thousands of businesses based in the borough and all the tourists and investment that we want to attract to Wyre.

21<sup>st</sup> century councillors require an extensive range of skills and knowledge, which they must keep under constant review to enable them to play an effective role in local government.

Wyre’s Councillor Development Strategy is designed to provide the ways and means in which councillors can augment their knowledge and attain all the professional skills and knowledge they need to carry out their role effectively and to make sure that development opportunities are available to all councillors, whatever their political viewpoint or level of prior experience.

Wyre Council has historically been acknowledged for its excellent member learning and development programme, and is proud to be going for reassessment for the North West Charter for Elected Member Development award.

Our ultimate intent is for Wyre to be a place where everyone can prosper. Every councillor who engages and participates fully with the strategy and associated annual programmes by taking advantage of the opportunities they offer, will demonstrate their commitment to make a positive difference to the community they represent.



Councillor Michael Vincent,  
Leader of the Council



Rebecca Huddleston,  
Chief Executive

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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- 1.1 Wyre Council understands that good governance; openness, accountability and transparency, can only be met through the effectiveness of their decision-makers. The 50 councillors that make up the council. Effective governance can only be achieved through well-trained, knowledgeable and confident councillors who adhere to Nolan's seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- 1.2 Wyre Council therefore puts the learning and development of its councillors at the heart of everything it does, and strives to continuously improve its offer, and ensuring that there is equal opportunity for all.
- 1.3 Most importantly, it is vital that councillors are involved from the beginning in their training and development. This was why the Councillor Development Group was commissioned in 2003, to give members the ability to have their say in how they are trained and what they are trained on. As improvements to learning and development opportunities continue, including the opportunity for councillors to attend training sessions virtually, we must ensure that all learning and development opportunities are equal and accessible to all. This was also the impetus behind the Councillor Portal, which was developed and trialled in 2021/2022 and officially launched in May 2023.
- 1.4 It is also important as we continue to work through the challenges faced by Local Government in recent years, that we embrace these challenges and adapt our offer to councillors whilst still ensuring the best quality training opportunities for our decision-makers. This is why the Councillor Development Strategy must be reviewed and refreshed annually, to respond to any challenges or changes to member development and to reflect the opinions of councillors highlighted in the annual Strengths and Development Questionnaires.
- 1.5 The council has undergone a number of changes since the strategy was last approved at Full Council in March 2023. A new Chief Executive has joined the council, we had all-out elections in May 2023 which saw us take in the biggest cohort of new councillors arrive in many years, and a new Council Plan has been developed and published.
- 1.6 The council is also updating its status for the North West Employers Elected Member Charter and an updated strategy will ensure that we set out the steps to achieving our Level 1 Review status and preparing for a further review in 2027.
- 1.7 The Councillor Development Group fully endorsed this refreshed Councillor Development Strategy for 2024-2028 at their meeting on 18 March 2023.



## 2. AIMS AND PURPOSE

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### Council Values and Priorities

- 2.1 The Councillor Development Strategy sets out the long-term plan of how the council will provide learning and development opportunities to councillors, as well as establishing goals it wishes to achieve in the four-year period. Refreshing the strategy annually also allows for flexibility to reflect changing priorities.
- 2.2 These changing priorities are reflected in the new Council Plan, refreshed and approved by Full Council in November 2023. To deliver on its objectives for residents, the Council Plan now focuses on four strategic themes:
- People and Communities
  - Growth and Prosperity
  - Place and Climate
  - Innovative and Customer Focused
- 2.3 Wyre is a place where everyone can prosper. We want everyone in Wyre to:
- have access to jobs and share the benefits of economic growth;
  - live in thriving, safe, more environmentally sustainable and welcoming communities; and
  - be healthier and independent for longer.
- 2.4 As the Council Plan is reviewed and monitored, changes may be made to corporate priorities or areas of improvement identified that will have an impact on training priorities for councillors.

### North West Elected Member Charter

- 2.5 The strategy also draws from the principles of the North West Charter for Elected Member Development. These principles are:
- having a clear commitment to councillor development;
  - ensuring the effective promotion of learning and development opportunities;
  - having a councillor led approach to developing learning and development;
  - having a strategy that includes impact measures within a continuous improvement framework.

## Aims and Purpose

- 2.6 Wyre's 50 councillors, elected in May 2023, are held accountable for the delivery of the Council's objectives. Therefore councillors must have the necessary skills and knowledge to take the crucial decisions that affect the lives and well-being of all those who live and work in the borough.
- 2.7 The purpose of the Councillor Development Strategy is to have an improved learning and development programme, influenced by the Councillor Development Group and the views of all councillors, to ensure the highest possible standards of training.
- 2.8 The aim of the Councillor Development Strategy is to have a knowledgeable and engaged group of councillors, who are continuously involved in their own development. To have consistent engagement of members in training opportunities, and to have an active forum for discussion and improvement through the Councillor Development Group. This is in order to achieve the Level 1 Review status of the North West Employers Elected Member Charter, and to ensure that this standard is achieved and improved on throughout the years.
- 2.9 The overall responsibility of the planning and delivery of member development is therefore a combination of the work of both officers and members.
- 2.10 The Councillor Development Strategy will set out an action plan to achieving the key strategic objectives of the council and a plan for achieving a Level 1 Review status.

## 3. ACTION PLAN

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### Objectives

- 3.1 The action plan for the Councillor Development Strategy sets out the four main objectives that the council wishes to achieve or improve on within the four year period. These objectives align with the principles of the North West Elected Member Charter as well as the strategic priorities of the council.

The four objectives are:

1. Increasing member engagement
2. Embedding good governance
3. Encouraging climate-friendly initiatives to match council priorities
4. Achieving Level 1 Review

### Action Plan

- 3.2 The action plan for the Councillor Development Strategy contains 11 actions relating to the four objectives as set out above. These actions have been identified through officer discussions, responses from the Strengths and Development Questionnaires and will contribute to the award of the North West Elected Member Charter Level 1 Review status. Each action includes steps to be taken, how it will be measured, current progress and departments involved in the actions.

This plan will be monitored by the Councillor Development Group and updated annually.

Objective	Action	What we will do	How we will measure it	Current progress	Who will action this
1	Review the best method for communicating learning and development opportunities to all members.	Survey members on the best methods for communication.	Using IT systems as well as attendance at events.		Councillor Development Group/Democratic Services
1	Ensure all members know they can feed back to the Councillor Development Group and the best method to do this.	Discussions with Councillor Development Group about best way to engage members.	Addition of item on Councillor Development agendas.  Members of CDG to encourage councillors to submit feedback or comments.		Councillor Development Group
1	Have at least three quarters of members attending pre-council briefing slots or this number attending sessions within a six month period.	Use responses from SDQs to tailor sessions to encourage members to attend.  To have the CDG act as ambassadors for training events open to all councillors.	Review attendance figures on a monthly basis.		Councillor Development Group/Democratic Services
2	Complete all mandatory training.	Democratic Services to review 2023/24 training programme to ensure all mandatory sessions have been covered.  Officers to discuss with Democratic Services	Review previous committee training programmes.  Officers to review committee decisions.		Democratic Services/Planning/Licensing/Audit/Legal/HR/Standards



		any missing required training.			
2	Review committee training programmes to ensure members feel knowledgeable in their committees.	Officers of all committees to prepare committee training programmes along with Democratic Services.	Analyse SDQ responses per committee member to address gaps in knowledge.  Develop committee surveys with officers to be circulated before end of municipal year.		Democratic Services/Planning/Licensing/Audit/Legal/HR/Standards
2	Review members' understanding of scrutiny and financial governance.	Members to complete Treasury Management training.  Continue pre-council briefings and pre-recorded videos on scrutiny and council finances.	Review SDQ responses in 2024/25.  Officers to review discussions/decisions in relation to scrutiny and financial governance.		Democratic Services/Finance
2	Ensure all learning and development opportunities provide value for money.	Officers to continue to review available learning and development opportunities.  Members to continue to submit member training application forms for costed events.	Officer responsible for member development budget to continue to review this on a monthly basis, in discussion with other officers.  The councillor development budget to continue to be presented to the Councillor Development Group for review and comment.		Councillor Development Group/Democratic Services

3	Have all members complete the Carbon Literacy training.	Discuss facilitating the training with the Councillor Development Group, Cabinet and Group Leaders along with the Climate Change team.	Ensure all councillors complete the Carbon Literacy training.		Democratic Services/Climate Change Officer
3	Review all learning and development opportunities to ensure that options for climate friendly sessions are considered.	Promote more carbon-friendly options for training.  Consider alternative options for traditional training events.	Monitor levels of in-person versus hybrid/online training sessions run in-house/pre-recorded briefings.		Democratic Services/Climate Change Officer
4	Evaluate and submit evidence to North West Employers for the Level 1 Review.	Democratic Services to continue working on evaluating and submitting evidence.  Continued updates to the Councillor Development Group on progress.	Ideally submitting all evidence by summer 2024.  Councillor Development Group to monitor officer progress, to make comments on improvements.		Democratic Services
4	Interviews conducted by North West Employers for the award of the Level 1 Review.	Following approval of submitted evidence to NWE, Democratic Services will arrange with relevant officers and councillors to take part in the interview process.	Ensuring submission of evidence and approval of evidence meets expected deadlines.  Councillor Development Group to be updated on progress.		Democratic Services

## 4. DELIVERY

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### Delivery

- 4.1 The Councillor Development Strategy establishes a clear framework underpinning the values of the organisation and an action plan setting out how it proposes to fulfil this vision. This vision is not just based on organisational needs, but individual needs of each and every elected member.
- 4.2 This is established through representations made to the Councillor Development Group, but also the annual Strengths and Development Questionnaire. This asks all councillors to submit their views on what learning and development areas they would like more support on, how this would be delivered and what best days/times of the week this should be delivered.
- 4.3 It is important to take into account the support needs of each councillor so that they all have the necessary skills at the required level to conduct their roles effectively.

### Equality of Opportunity

- 4.4 This means ensuring and promoting equality of opportunity for all. Training opportunities will be organised, ensuring there are no physical, social, religious, cultural or general medical barriers to members taking advantage of these opportunities.
- 4.5 The learning and development programme will also have an emphasis on contributing to the decrease in the council's carbon emissions. This means trying to find opportunities to host sessions virtually, and being as paperless as possible, putting climate change at the forefront of all our development opportunities.

## 5. MEASURING SUCCESS

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### Evaluation

- 5.1 Part of the submitted evidence to the North West Elected Member Charter includes the requirement for evidence of a majority of councillors being involved in their personal development plans. An indicator of a successful strategy would be the approval of the submitted evidence and subsequent award of the Level 1 Review status; but also overall increased engagement from members on their personal learning and development.
- 5.2 Members will be encouraged to reflect on their learning and development, both through the Strengths and Development Questionnaires as well as requirements to present feedback on training events to the Democratic Services team within 14 days of the event.
- 5.3 Responses to the Strengths and Development Questionnaires will be evaluated annually when councillors are asked to re-submit responses. This is the starting point for a councillor's personal development plan; all 50 councillors elected/re-elected in May 2023 were asked to submit a questionnaire response, highlighting further areas of support or development. Of these, 29 were completed and returned and the data used to populate
- 5.4 A successful strategy will show an improvement in these responses, with fewer topics being identified for more support and in particular, committee members feeling confident in their knowledge of their committees. Regular surveys of committee members will be encouraged.
- 5.5 On the 19 June 2023, the Councillor Development Group approved their updated terms of reference, to include the provision of an annual period report of the group to Full Council. The periodic report will discuss the group's work for that municipal year, including reporting on progress on each of the actions/objectives.
- 5.6 The Councillor Development Group review the member training budget and ongoing training programme as a standing item at every meeting; along with the responsible officer, they can evaluate all training to ensure it provides value for money and promote the needs of councillors.

## Strengths and Development Questionnaires (SDQs)

- 5.7 The SDQs, as mentioned, are an integral part of a councillor's training programme and personal development plan. They are to be circulated annually to all councillors, following consultation with the Councillor Development Group.
- 5.8 The questionnaire is designed to help officers when organising the next year's training programme. The questionnaire will focus on the best circumstances to hold training sessions/events, and asking members to show what areas in particular they would want prioritised as a matter of further support and development.
- 5.9 The Councillor Development Group will have the opportunity to review the format and circulation of the questionnaire annually before it is circulated to all members. They will also have the opportunity to review the anonymised data and in collaboration with the councillor development officer, produce the annual Councillor Development Programme.
- 5.10 All members are recommended to submit a questionnaire response. The Councillor Development Group are expected to promote the questionnaires and encourage councillors to submit a response.

## 6. RESOURCES

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### Officer resources

- 6.1 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.

### Financial resources

- 6.2 The council allocated a member training budget of £11,000 for 2024/25 and this is typical of the level requested (£7,000 - £11,000) each year. This budget is to be used solely for all 50 members' learning and development needs, including external speakers, consultations, and online webinars. The councillor development officer is responsible for the member development budget and it is their responsibility to allocate the funds appropriately and to ensure and show value for money for all learning and development opportunities.
- 6.3 In line with the member training and development policy, all members are required to submit a member training and development application form for any and all learning and development opportunities that are paid for through the member development budget. The council reserves the right to recoup any costs if a member fails to attend without giving sufficient notice to Democratic Services in line with the procedure.

### Councillor resources

- 6.4 All councillors have access to the Councillor Portal, a councillor-focused intranet hosted via Sharepoint. The portal includes news items, useful tips and tricks, as well as copies of the Constitution, induction materials and recorded training videos.
- 6.5 Councillors also have access to the Local Government Association Councillor Hub, which has additional resources such as briefing notes, short e-learning courses and workbooks on useful topics.
- 6.6 External learning and development opportunities will also be advertised to all councillors or to relevant committees. The council works with trusted organisations and those recommended by the LGA and North West Employers. These might include:
- 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).

### **Councillor Development Group**

6.7

Following the original signing of the North West Charter for Elected Member Development declaration in 2001, the Councillor Development Group was commissioned in 2003. The group is a cross-party, designated group of councillors that is committed to supporting councillor development and ensures a councillor-led approach in decisions related to member training.

The Councillor Development Group are expected to act as ambassadors of the council's training programme; represent the voices of fellow councillors; work closely with officers to ensure that all learning and development opportunities meet the needs and are accessible to all councillors.

The group will be expected to present feedback from their fellow members, to comment and review the training budget and calendar of training sessions and ensure that the learning and development opportunities hosted and advertised by the council provide value for money.

## 7. COUNCILLOR SKILLS FRAMEWORK

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### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Councillor

- 7.1 In 2016, the University of Birmingham in collaboration with North West Employers published “The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Councillor”; a research project which reported on the changing roles of the modern councillor and advice for councils on how best to support councillors as expectations evolved.
- 7.2 The guide sets out the two main skill sets they identified as being important for councillors to have: foundational skills and relational skills. Within these two skill sets were five types of skills: practical; knowledge-based; connective; digital; and reflective.
- 7.3 These two skill sets cover the basics that all councillors should feel confident in, or receive additional support in. These are:
- Understanding how the council works
  - Committee training
  - Being an effective ward councillor
  - Organisational skills
  - Chairing/participating in a meeting
  - Political skills
  - Communication skills
  - Fostering good working relationships
  - Influencing, negotiating and questioning skills
  - Digital and ICT skills
  - Personal safety and resilience as a ward councillor

### Wyre Councillor Skills Framework

- 7.4 Taking the identified skill sets from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Councillor, as well as those identified by North West Employers/Local Government Association and learning and development surveys, the attached framework has been developed to set out the roles, responsibilities and expectations of all councillors at Wyre. This is then further developed for members of specific committees, Chairs/Vice-Chairs, Lead Members, the Mayor/Deputy Mayor and the Executive.
- 7.5 The framework can then be used by councillors when completing their Strengths and Development Questionnaires and committee surveys to evaluate their role and where they might need further support.



## Appendix

Appendix 1 – Wyre Councillor Skills Framework

Appendix 2 – Councillor Development Programme 2024-25

Appendix 3 – Strengths and Development Questionnaire