

COUNCILLORS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROTOCOL

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DRAFT - SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY O&S

1. Learning and Development Member Champions – Introduction

As elected Councillors who have varied political careers, we appreciate the demands of the role of being a Councillor. We acknowledge that over the years the role of an elected Councillor has transformed and continues to evolve with ever changing demands from those that we are elected to represent. These are in addition to the various challenges local authorities continue to experience and the decisions we have to make. One way to support Councillors is by developing the Learning and Development Protocol which we as the Learning and Development Member Champions are delighted to endorse.

Each elected Councillor brings a variety of skills, knowledge and experience to the role. The Learning and Development Protocol details the learning provision and support that Councillors will be offered to help support them in their roles and to develop their knowledge as a result of issues such as new legislation or more local issues, whilst contributing to the delivery of the Council's priorities, objectives and ambitions.

Signed:

Cllr Val Bryant – Labour & Co-Operative Group Leader

Cllr Ruth Brown – Liberal Democrat Group Leader

Cllr Ralph Muncer – Conservative & Unionist Group Leader

2. Officer Introduction

We are pleased to present the North Hertfordshire Council Councillor Learning and Development Protocol, which outlines how we support you in your roles as elected representatives.

The Protocol provides a clear and consistent framework for identifying training needs, planning development activities, and ensuring all Members have access to the skills and knowledge required to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

North Herts Council is committed to offering a programme that is relevant, accessible, and aligned with both statutory requirements and the Council's priorities. This includes mandatory training, specific development and opportunities designed to strengthen decision-making, scrutiny and community engagement.

The Protocol also sets out the roles of Officers and the Learning and Development Member Champions, ensuring transparency in how training is prioritised, delivered and reviewed.

Our approach supports Members at every stage of their term – from induction through to ongoing development, recognising that effective governance depends on continuous learning and a shared understanding of the standards expected of us. As we progress through the Local Government Reorganisation journey, it will be more important for Members to attend training provided to understand how this will impact and change the role of Councillors, and the new skills required for this.

Signed:

James Lovegrove – Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager

Melanie Stimpson – Democratic Services Manager

Isabelle Alajooz – Monitoring Officer

Anthony Roche – Chief Executive

3. Approach to Councillor Development at North Herts Council

Three Member Learning and Development Champions have been nominated and form a cross party steering group to assist with the identification of learning and development needs, planning and delivery of activities.

Two Member Champions meetings take place annually, including the three appointed Member Champions, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager and the Learning and Development Manager. These meetings take place in September and March annually, with the September meeting to discuss the outcomes of the Councillor Skills Audit and any required actions from this and the March meeting to review the proposals for the Member Induction / Development week.

3a. Compulsory training

As part of the North Herts Council Councillor's Code of Conduct¹, it is necessary for Councillors to attend compulsory training provided by the authority. It will be compulsory if:

- Full Council, Cabinet or a Committee decide it is, or
- Group Leaders agree that it should be compulsory with any of the Statutory Officers (Head of Paid Service; Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer); or
- a Councillor is directed to attend training following a Councillor conduct complaint.
- If a Councillor sits on the Planning Control or Licensing and Regulation Committee. [NB Councillors cannot participate in decision making at either Committee unless the compulsory training has been completed].

Compulsory training currently includes:

- Safeguarding
- Data Protection
- Anti-bribery and Anti-Fraud
- Councillor Code of Conduct

It is understood that Councillors are busy and relevant officers will use their best endeavours to accommodate training flexibly, including the use of e-Learning modules where appropriate. In return, Councillors are expected to make every effort to attend and participate in any session to meet these requirements.

Reporting on Compulsory Training

An annual report on Compulsory Training will be presented to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September (or nearest meeting available).

The annual report will also be provided to the Leadership Team, Group Leaders and the Political Liaison Board to provide key information on Councillor Development and ensure that compulsory training is being completed as required.

The report will detail the completion rate of required, compulsory training by Councillors and will detail those individuals who have not completed the specified training by the required date.

¹ As per the North Herts Council Councillor's Code of Conduct 8.1 – see Section 17 of the Constitution

3b. Specialised / other training

Outside of any compulsory training Councillors are encouraged to attend any specialised training or development events provided. These are designed to extend knowledge in matters such as planning and licensing law, regulations, procedures, Codes of Practice and the Development Plans beyond the minimum referred to in the above and therefore support Councillors to carry out their role effectively.

If a Councillor is likely to be a Chair or Vice Chair, of any internal or public facing meeting, or has ambitions to become one, then Chairing skills training will be offered, and Councillors are encouraged to attend. Where Councillors are invited to annual refresher training, they should endeavour to attend.

There is also important training provided to Members on other topics, such as Environmental Sustainability and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, which Members should engage with and complete required e-Learning or attend relevant events arranged.

3c. The GROWZone

The GROW Zone is the Council's Learning Management System which is designed to manage an individual's learning and development activities.

Learning reports on individual Councillors can be generated within the system of completed training and will be shared with external partners, such as the Shared Anti Fraud Service, for auditing purposes, or the Information Commissioners Office, in the event of a data breach.

4. Delivery of Member Development at North Herts Council

4a. New Councillor Welcome Pack

Following all out elections (or a by election), all Councillors will be issued with a New Councillor Welcome Pack. This pack will be provided both as a paper version, as well as electronic version sent to private email accounts. *(Note the private email account will only be used until the North Herts Council email is activated.)*

The pack will contain key information for new Councillors including the necessary paperwork to be completed once successfully elected.

Other useful information such as details of senior management and their areas of responsibility, Councillor role descriptions, guidelines for using social media, reference to other essential documents i.e. the Constitution, are provided within this pack.

4b. Member Induction Week

Following all out elections, a Member Induction Week will take place and will provide sessions for all Councillors to attend (new and returning) on general Council information, as well as specific training for meetings, such as Scrutiny, Licensing and Planning.

There is a significant amount of information to learn, particularly as a new Councillor. To assist, the Council will deliver a Councillors Induction Programme, which is endorsed annually by the Learning and Development Member Champions, Group Leaders, the Leadership Team, Monitoring Officer and other Senior Officers.

4c. Member Development Week

In the years where the Council does not have all out elections, a Member Development Week will take place instead of the Induction Week. Sessions provided in the Development Week will build on previous information and sessions provided, as well as address any specific needs identified through the Councillor Skills Audit responses and any specific requirements to support upcoming decisions.

4d. Member Development Sessions

Throughout each Civic Year a Councillor Development Programme will be formulated by the Learning and Development Member Champions with the assistance of the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager and the Learning and Development Team.

These ongoing sessions will address a general training need for Councillors, a specific decision related need or any other needs as identified within the Councillor Skills Audit. Some sessions may be directed at specific Councillors, depending on their role or Committees to which they are appointed.

The purpose of the Councillor Development Programme is to bring together all learning and development opportunities available to individuals, Committees and political leadership, which are considered and prioritised against specific needs and resources.

There are dates for these sessions included in the Calendar of Meetings, approved at Annual Council. However, further sessions are usually required throughout the year, for which additional dates are identified.

4e. Member Briefings

Throughout the year, as required by the relevant departments, briefings and / or workshops will be arranged.

Whilst these briefings / workshops are not compulsory for Councillors to attend (unless advised otherwise), it is important that Councillors endeavour to attend these, as they will provide key, up-to-date information on the topic, and will allow for open questions to be put to the relevant Officers.

Where possible, these will be recorded and uploaded to The GROWZone, alongside any slides from the briefing.

4f. Pre-Meeting Briefings

Some future business upcoming at a particular meeting may require Officers to arrange a specific pre-meeting briefing for Councillors. This is an informal session at which Officers will present information and allow Councillors the opportunity to ask questions in a private setting (ahead of the public meeting).

Subject to adoption of the process at Full Council in April 2026, for larger planning applications, a Member Briefing will be held ahead of consideration at the Planning Control Committee. Members and substitutes of the Planning Control Committee would be invited to attend and at least two Officers will be present. These will be recorded, where possible, and will be shared with all members and subs of the Planning Control Committee who were unable to attend.

It is important that at any pre-meeting briefing Councillors do not make any comments or express an opinion which could be considered as predetermination.

4g. External Attendance at Courses

Within the Budget setting process the Council allocates an amount for Councillor Development each year. All Political Groups (and Independent Members) are allocated a proportion of the overall Members Training Budget to spend on attendance at paid for courses, according to the number of Councillors per group.

Councillors should contact their Party Group Leader for approval to attend an external event, who should confirm that this can be booked to the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, and the booking will be processed.

However, if the Council arranges for an external trainer to provide a general Councillor Group event, then this will be taken from the overall budget and the Political Group budgets, or individual independent Councillor amount shall be reduced accordingly.

Councillors are welcome to attend courses which are free of charge and any relevant courses will be promoted by the Committee Services Team through the Members Information Service.

5. Evaluation

5a. Feedback on Sessions

Following attendance at any training event, Councillors will be requested to offer feedback. This provides an opportunity for Councillors to highlight where there are any areas of improvement as well as the positive experiences, so that the learning and development programme can continue to develop. The results shall be collated and presented at the same time as the Annual Report.

5b. Councillor Skills Self Audit

A Councillor Skills Self Audit will take place annually in May or June and will be completed through an e-Form. This Audit will assess Councillors views on their own confidence, on a 1 to 5 scale, in specific areas of Council business, including, but not limited to:

- Committee Skills
- Communication
- Finance
- IT and Data Protection
- Scrutiny
- Planning
- Licensing

6. In Person / Remote Provision

The Council is committed to the principle of equality in the learning and development opportunities and activities for all Councillors.

It is acknowledged that Councillors have many conflicting demands on their time, so where possible development activities will be provided at different times to accommodate various needs. Whilst some training will be offered as hybrid / in-person, the preference for Councillor training will be to provide sessions remotely via Zoom or Teams, in line with the Climate Emergency declared by the Council. Officers arranging hybrid / in-person sessions will need to provide specific reasoning for this requirement.

Additionally, everyone has different learning preferences. Therefore, the Council will aim to provide development materials in a variety of formats and make training interactive and appealing.

Wherever possible internal training will be delivered by officers in partnership with relevant Councillors.

7. Councillor Buddying Arrangements

Those Councillors that have been elected for a number of years have a vast amount of knowledge and experiences which would be invaluable to less experienced Councillors. Buddying / mentoring by an experienced Councillor is another support mechanism, particularly for new Councillors or those aspiring to different roles. Political Group Leaders are asked to support mentoring arrangements and manage these directly within the Political Groups.

8. Links to Key Pages and Policies

[The GROW Zone Learning Management System](#)

9. Key Contacts

Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager
James.Lovegrove@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474204

Learning and Development Manager
Helen.Bylett@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474619

Committee Services
Committee.Services@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474655

HR: Hrhelp@north-herts.gov.uk

IT helpdesk: 01462 474444

Electronic Communication

Every Councillor is provided with a tablet device and/or a laptop which can access the intranet, Mod.Gov, The GROWZone and email, which enables Councillors to support the reduction in use of paper and quick access to important information.