Bury Council Member Development Strategy 2020-24

Agreed at Member Development Group 14 September 2020 and recommended for approval by Cabinet and Council.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council is a complex, democratically accountable organisation, which secures and provides a wide variety of public services for and on behalf of, the residents of Bury.

1.2 Councillors have a critical part to play to help deliver the aims of the Council. They are also involved in a range of other initiatives to help achieve positive outcomes for residents.

1.3 Councillors are representatives, servants, champions and leaders of their local communities. They make decisions, champion change, and challenge and scrutinise proposed actions, communicate Council plans and take up issues raised with them by constituents. The role is a demanding one. Strong and effective leadership is a key to effective, accountable and responsive local government and the more successful the Council is, the higher the expectations of the local community.

1.4 There are 51 elected members, 3 representing each of Bury's 17 electoral wards, elected by thirds each year. In May 2020, there were 28 Labour councillors, 16 Conservative councillors, 4 Liberal Democrat councillors, two Radcliffe First councillors and one Independent councillor.

1.5 The Council has a Cabinet of nine and has two overview and scrutiny committees, plus a number of regulatory and quasi-judicial committees. This structure provides a range of opportunities for leadership and other roles. Many of these roles are demanding and require specific skills. Finding opportunities for less experienced Councillors to develop the skills that will equip them for a future leadership role is an integral part of the Strategy.

1.6 Learning and development is key to being an effective and high performing local authority. A planned approach to needs assessment and identification, within the context of a sound Member Development Strategy, will help ensure that Councillors are equipped to help the Council define and implement sound policies and drive service performance, whether as an executive or non-executive Member.

1.7 The Member Development Group ("the Group") has been appointed to promote learning and development for all councillors. It comprises all the Political Group Leaders and is chaired by Cllr Trevor Holt, one of the longest serving councillors with over 36 years' service. The Group meets a minimum of 4 times a year.

1.8 An all member survey was carried out during August 2020 to seek councillors' views on member development and has been used to inform the Strategy and Training Plan for 2020/21 set out at Annexe 1.

1.9 The Local Government Association encourage and support continued professional development for councillors. They have published a Member Development Charter that provides councils with a robust framework as a guide and benchmark to follow.

1.10 The Charter sets out three essential criteria designed to help councils build their elected member capacity which have been used to shape this Strategy. These are:

1. There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support
2. The council has a strategic approach to councillor development
3. Learning and development is effective in building councillor capacity.

2. The Strategy

2.1 Developing, implementing and sustaining a strategic approach to Member Development in order to ensure that all Councillors are always adequately equipped to carry out their role as effectively as possible is the overarching purpose of the Strategy.

2.2 To do this, the Group has identified a number of strategic priorities for the period 2020-23, including:

(i) Developing the leadership capabilities of Councillors to ensure continuity and clarity of direction for the community and the organisation;

(ii) Recognising the impact caused by ongoing annual elections over the next 4 years with elections by thirds on current ward boundaries in 2021; all out elections on new ward boundaries in 2022, elections by thirds in 2023 and ongoing.

(iii) Ensuring that Members understand the nature of the integrated arrangements with NHS Clinical Commissioning group for adult and health services across Bury.

(iv) Recognising the impact of Covid-19 to the running of the council and on the health and wellbeing of Bury residents.

(v) Supports the successful delivery of the Bury 2030 strategy and the role councillors will play in extending community voice and resident engagement

(v) Implementing a training programme which:

- is based on a set of core requirements applicable to all Members, requirements tailored to Councillors undertaking specific roles and also addressing requirements identified by Councillors themselves ;
- is based on an agreed set of role descriptions for specific roles e.g. committee chair, cabinet member etc.
- includes high quality induction arrangements for new councillors
- recognises the demands created by having to operate in a post covid-19 environment which relies on remote communication, remote working and limited opportunities to meet face to face
- ensures equality of access to learning and development opportunities;
- includes a regular process of monitoring and review in order to ensure the effectiveness of the investment made in learning and development;
- is based on agreed priorities and budget allocation and ensures that best use is made of available resources.

3. Implementation

3.1 To ensure the implementation of this Strategy, the Head of Democratic Services (HDS) will discuss progress regularly with the Political Group Leaders to ensure that training and development is appropriate, relevant and addresses both individual and Council needs and priorities.

3.2 A budget of £XXX is allocated for learning and development for Councillors. The budget is managed by the HDS. In future, the HDS will agree annually any overriding priorities for the coming year with Group Leaders and will determine the budget required to meet those priorities.

3.3 Delivering the strategy and annual Training Plan will be overseen by the HDS, in consultation with the Group Leaders, who will report annually to the Standards Committee. The results of the annual Members' Survey will feed into the strategy which will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

4. Commitment

4.1 The effectiveness of the Strategy is dependent on a commitment from all Councillors to allocate time each year to reviewing their learning and development needs and to take an active part in the events that have been organised on their behalf.

4.2 Wherever possible learning should be shared with colleagues.

4.3 The Council recognises that, whilst many Members will already have served one or more terms and be knowledgeable and experienced, all Members have ongoing development needs. For example:

• as new Members gaining core skills or familiarising themselves with specific service areas;

• as a Member promoted or soon to be promoted to a position of responsibility requiring additional skills or knowledge;

• as a more experienced Member looking to refresh knowledge, skills or ways of working;

• all Members, requiring a briefing on key issues, such as council finances, or significant changes to the standards regime, the Constitution or other key procedures;

• all Members, to help them keep abreast of local and national drivers for change, especially in local policies and service delivery.

5. Equality of opportunity

5.1 Councillors have many competing demands on their time; many have full-time day jobs or family commitments that may make it difficult to find time for their own development. The Council is committed to looking for creative ways of enabling councillors to take part in development activities at times that are convenient to them.

6. Annual Training Plan

6.1 Bury elections take place every year. The Training Plan is therefore planned on an annual basis and includes a Member Induction Programme and refresher session on important aspects of governance and finance. The first Plan will cover the remainder of 2020/21 and 2021/22. There will be all out elections in 2022/3 and this will require a more intense Plan to support newly elected councillors at that time.

7. New Member induction

7.1 The Council will provide an extensive Induction Programme each year, made up of training sessions, written guidance and ward walks with one of the Council's most senior officers. It will start immediately following the elections each year for newly elected or re-elected Members and will continue by way of additional briefings and training relevant to their particular role.

7.2 The Induction materials used each time will be revised and republished every four years with effect from 2022 and constitute the written guidance which will be made available to all Members of the Council.

7.3 The Induction material will provide Members with a sound foundation of knowledge on the Council's powers and duties; the delivery of its services; the Members' Code of Conduct; local government finance, the inspection regime and

other requirements/constraints; the Council's organisational structure and principal service areas; and who to go to for ongoing support and advice.

8. Ongoing training

8.1 The Council will provide ongoing core skills training for Members on the basis both of needs identified by Members themselves and new opportunities identified by officers. These skills cover, for example, chairing meetings, media awareness, public speaking and presentation skills, dealing with casework/paperwork, IT skills and other, more 'political', skills (some of which may be more appropriately addressed within party groups).

8.2 A significant part of a Councillor's time is spend serving constituents and dealing with matters raised by them. Whilst some matters can simply be referred to officers, others require the Councillor to act as advocate for the constituent and to monitor or chase-up any delay in resolution of an issue. This involves significant organisational, mediation and negotiation skills and an ability to distinguish the priority casework items. The Council recognises that dealing efficiently and effectively with casework does not come naturally to all and any skills deficit must be addressed, whether through training, mentoring, shadowing or some other means. The Council will ensure that all Members receive training on casework management.

8.3 All political groups have a buddying system in place to support newly elected councillors or those who are appointed to a new position within the Council. In addition the Council seeks to make use of a range of external programmes such as the LGA Leadership Programme and the fast track programme for young councillors to help members develop their skills and knowledge.

9. Statutory and procedural requirements

9.1 The Council recognises that all Councillors must be conversant with the Council's Constitutional and procedural requirements, with ethical governance (the Members' Code of Conduct and standards regime), Data Protection and Freedom of Information.

9.2 The Council will seek the support of Group Leaders to organise, as appropriate, events which periodically refresh Members' knowledge and understanding of these areas and at which, in some cases, attendance may be mandatory. There will also be mandatory training for Members of the Council's Planning Control Committee and its Sub-Committees and of the Licensing and Safety Panel and its sub-committees.

9.3 In addition, Members will be offered regular briefings and/or training on the local government finance regime, budgets and financial planning, value for money and use of resources and audit and risk management.

10. External training opportunities

10.1 The Council will pay all reasonable travel and accommodation costs, in line with the provisions of the Members' Allowances Scheme, for learning and development events such as conferences and seminars organised externally. Any member who wishes to attend a conference or external event has to complete an internal booking form which outlines why they want to attend, what they will gain and the costs. This must be approved, in advance, by the HDS and their Group Leader.

11. Alternative learning methods

11.1 The Council recognises that Members have many calls upon their time and it is not always easy for them to attend formal learning and development events. The Covid -19 crisis has also restricted the opportunity to meet face to face at live training events. Also, different people learn in different ways and may not always respond to conventional delivery styles. In order to address these issues, the Council will seek to provide development opportunities through a variety of methods. Where practical and within budgetary constraints, the intended range will include, presentations, workshops, individual coaching, mentoring, e-learning, on-line resources and self-directed learning.

12. Evaluation

12.1 In order to monitor the effectiveness and value for money of any training, Members will be invited to complete a training evaluation form in respect of each education, training and development event attended. Feedback will also be sought annually via the Members' survey.

13. Budget

13.1 The Council will seek to ensure, as far as possible, that adequate budgetary provision is available to enable all Members to address development needs.

14. Publicity and communication

14.1 Member development opportunities will be advertised widely and as far in advance as possible.

15. Contacts and assistance

15.1 The delivery of Member training and development is administered by the Council's Democratic Services Team.

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