



London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Member Learning and Development Strategy 2023-2026

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the Member Learning and Development Strategy is to set the high-level vision for Member Development.
- 1.2 The aim of Member development is to enable all Members to develop and enhance their skills, knowledge and capacity in carrying out their roles. This in turn supports the work of the Council and helps improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Tower Hamlets.
- 1.3 The Strategy is designed to support all Members, including the Mayor, Councillors and Co-optees.
- 1.4 The Strategy is supported by a Member Induction Plan for the first year immediately following the local elections and then three yearly Member Development Plans for years 2, 3 and 4 of the electoral cycle.
- 1.5 The content of this Strategy must be accounted for when developing the Induction and Development Plans,

2. A Programme that Supports All Members

- 2.1 The Member Learning and Development Strategy will support all Members in the wide variety of roles that they perform with the Council.
- 2.2 In particular, the Strategy takes account of:
 - The Council's Strategic Plan
 - Members' different roles and responsibilities
 - General skills useful to all Members
 - Mandatory training

The Strategic Plan

- 2.3 The Strategy recognises that all Members' work takes place in the context of the Council's vision set out in the Strategic Plan. Members have a key role to play in helping the Council achieve its vision as set out in the Plan:
 - Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis
 - Providing homes for the future
 - Accelerating Education
 - Boosting culture, business, jobs and leisure
 - Investing in public services
 - Empowering communities and fighting crime
 - Working towards a clean and green future
 - A council that listens and works for everyone

General Skills Useful to All Members

2.4 The Strategy also recognises that there are many general skills that are important for all Members and that training should be available to support Members in developing these skills. Examples include:

- Community Leadership and engagement
- Chairing meetings
- Public Speaking
- Managing Casework
- Reading and evaluating reports / speed reading
- Managing physical and online safety
- ICT

Member Roles and Responsibilities

2.5 The Induction and yearly Development Plans should take account of the Council’s Strategic Plan, the electoral cycle and other issues the Plan should also take account of the different roles that Members play both at the Council and in relation to their work with partners and the local community.

Community Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak and act for all communities and neighbourhoods as a community advocate. • Be accessible to the whole of their electorate including by holding surgeries and responding to queries and issues. • Foster good working relations between service providers and communities. • Leading and mediating on issues of concern within their Ward. • Acknowledging and celebrating achievements within their ward
Partnership Working and External Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representing the Council on various External Bodies as appointed by the Council. • Being appointed to Partnership Bodies working with the Council’s partners to guide policy and action within the borough. • Build good working relations with the Council’s partner organisations.
Executive Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team to develop and implement Council strategies. • Communicating a shared Council vision to local people, providing clear direction and promoting understanding.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging scrutiny by responding positively to feedback and challenging ideas. • Take collective responsibility for the decisions taken by the Executive. • Guide the development of, and sign off, the Council's major policies and strategies. • Undertake necessary training to become familiar with their portfolio and seek opportunities to expand on this.
Overview and Scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorously and objectively, scrutinise and challenge the Council's policies, decisions and performance. • Engage with external service providers, community organisations and local people to reflect wider concerns and issues. • Examine good practice from other authorities and make rigorous, evidenced based recommendations.
Committee Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit on the Council's Committees and take decisions on the Non-Executive reports presented. • Undertake necessary training to become familiar with their role on their specific Committee such as Licensing, Planning, Appointments and Appeals. • Follow legal process and protocols, including quasi-judicial procedures where appropriate, balancing public needs and local policy.
Civic Role (inc Speaker)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform civic duties in an open and inclusive manner welcoming and supporting members of all local communities. • Chair meetings of the Council in a fair and impartial way
Backbencher / Opposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To participate constructively in the good governance of the borough and effectively represent the interests of the Ward for which they are elected.
Co-opted Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed to specific Committees/Bodies to support the Council's work and provide external challenge.

Mandatory Training

2.6 For governance and regulatory reasons certain training is mandatory for all Members to complete. This includes:

Title	Who	When?
Ethics and Probity Training	All Members	Must attend during Member Induction plus one more session in each 4 year election cycle.

Committee specific training for Planning, Licensing, Appeals and Appointments Committees	Members appointed to the relevant Committee	Must attend training before sitting on the Committee. Further training as required (usually a yearly refresher).
Equalities Training	Mayor, Councillors	Must attend during Member Induction.
Chairing skills	Speaker and all Chairs who have not previously attended training	Sessions arranged at the start of each municipal year.
Information Governance and Data Protection	Mayor, Councillors	Must attend during Member Induction and any follow up training as required.
Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding Training	Mayor, Councillors	Must attend during Member Induction and any follow up training as required.
Personal Safety	Mayor, Councillors	Must attend during Member Induction and any follow up training as required.

3. Development and Oversight of the Strategy and Member Learning and Development

Oversight of Member Learning and Development

- 3.1 The Standards Advisory Committee receive an annual report on Member Learning and Development as part of their role to monitor Member standards. This report will include details of training over the previous year including attendance, cost and feedback as well as looking at plans for the coming year. In addition, the Standards Advisory Committee will be asked to formally sign-off each four-year Member Development Strategy and the Member Induction Plan before each set of local elections. They will then be asked to agree the Member Learning and Development Plans during each of the following three years.
- 3.2 The informal Member Learning and Development Working Group will maintain a regular review of progress against the Strategy, the Induction Plan and the Development Plans. The group will meet at least twice a year (along with online discussions where useful) and will be open to all interested Members, with a core Membership of two Councillors from each of the political groups on the Council.

- 3.3 The Standards Advisory Committee and the Member Learning and Development Working Group will be supported by Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer.

Developing and Reviewing the Strategy

- 3.4 The Strategy is developed and agreed by the cross-party Member Learning and Development Working Group working in conjunction with Democratic Services and the Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer.
- 3.5 Once agreed by the Working Group, the Strategy will be presented to the Corporate Leadership Team for officer agreement and submitted to the Standards Advisory Committee for final sign-off.
- 3.6 The Member Learning and Development Working Group will then monitor the effectiveness of the Strategy and may from time to time propose minor changes to be agreed by the Monitoring Officer. Significant changes to the Strategy must be approved by the Standards Advisory Committee at its next available meeting.
- 3.7 The Strategy should be agreed before the start of each four-year electoral cycle along with the Member Induction Plan for the training and support to be provided in the year following the election.
- 3.8 The content of this Strategy and feedback from Members from the Induction period, individual training sessions, member training plans and more generally should be reviewed by the Working Group and used to guide creation of the Member Induction and Member Development Plans.

4. Provision of Member Learning and Development Training

- 4.1 Where possible, for cost and efficiency reasons, training will be provided internally. However, external trainers should be used where they have specific skills and experience that would be valuable.
- 4.2 In person training will usually take place at the Town Hall but other venues may be utilised where this adds value to the training.
- 4.3 Members will also be encouraged to undertake relevant externally held training and development opportunities, especially when directly related to their roles and the course is provided by a recognised provider such as the Local Government Association or London Councils.
- 4.4 Where Members wish to undertake training which has a fee attached, they must complete the training request form and have this signed by their group whip, leader and the Monitoring Officer. Completed forms will be accepted where possible provided the proposed training meets a required skill for

Members or is specific to their role on the Council. When agreeing these requests the Member's personal training budget and the overall training budget should be taken into account.

- 4.5 [Note – core set of skills training with automatic permission? – linked to Role Descriptions?]
- 4.6 There will be a general presumption of agreement where Members wish to undertake Local Government Association courses and training events, including the Leadership Academy, providing the training request form has been completed and agreed.

Individual Member Training Budgets

- 4.7 Each Member has a personal training budget of XXX per year to be allocated to their learning and development. Some examples of potential uses of this budget include:
- Provision of individualised training
 - Attendance at external training and events
 - A contribution to group training organised for a specific group of Members.
 - Access to online learning portals.
- 4.8 The Individual Member Budget is not necessarily a cap on training spend. Additional, or more expensive, courses can be considered where they are appropriate to the role the Member is undertaking or is agreed as a development opportunity to support future roles.
- 4.9 All training agreed as part of the Individual Member Budget must relate to knowledge or skills which are relevant to the Member's role(s) as a Mayor/Councillor.
- 4.10 A Member **must** have completed their Personal Development Plan in order to access their personal Member Training Budget.

Personal Development Plans

- 4.11 The creation of a Personal Development Plan is the Members' opportunity to set out the learning and development which would be useful to them. This information is also helpful in enabling the Council to arrange general Member Training where a large number of Members have indicated a particular training need.
- 4.12 Members will be asked to complete their PDP as part of the Member Induction Process and will be asked to review it yearly.
- 4.13 Completion of the PDP allows access to the Individual Member Training Budget.

Calendar of Training Sessions

- 4.14 The Annual Calendar of Council and Committee meetings will include a number of slots spaced throughout the year where training sessions could be held without clashing with any formal Committee meetings. This does not restrict sessions being arranged on other dates and not all calendared slots may be used.

Types of Learning and Development

- 4.15 When preparing the Induction Plan and the Member Development Plans, the Council will look to ensure that a variety of methods of training are offered to cover the different ways that different individuals learn including, in person training, hybrid and online training sessions, 'in your own time' training, and documents/guides.
- 4.16 In Person Learning and Development Training
- These will usually be on topics based around skills that are useful to all, or many, Members. Sessions will usually be at the Town Hall and may be run by external training where this is useful. Sessions will usually be repeated at a different time/date to encourage attendance.
 - This training will usually be offered to all Members.
 - Presentations from Training sessions will be added to the Members Hub for future reference.
- 4.17 Member Seminars
- Seminars are subject matter sessions which are provided to give Members information about important issues that the Council is currently dealing with or is preparing for in the near future. Seminars are usually requested by Council Services Areas and are run by those Services.
 - Seminars must be open to all Members and will usually be offered twice (once during the day and once in the evening) and be available to attend in person and online.
 - Presentations from Seminars will be added to the Members Hub for future reference.
 - As Member Seminars are issue-led they will not normally form part of the main Learning and Development Plan but will be arranged ad-hoc as required.
- 4.18 Online and 'in your own time' Training
- There are many online courses available for Members to complete in their own time.

- These could be provided through the Council's Learning Hub or ICT suite or by many external providers.
- Democratic Services will advertise this to Members when they are aware of relevant training.
- However, Members are also encouraged to proactively look out for training opportunities.
- All Members are welcome to complete free courses. Where a cost is attached, a training request form will need to be completed and agreed.
- A number of documents and guides are available on the Members' Hub as well as links to LGA Councillor Workbooks covering a wide variety of areas.

4.19 External Training

- Provided by external organisations such as the Local Government Association.
- Usually targeted at Members nationally; either generally or those who undertake specific roles.
- Includes a variety of sessions including short training sessions through to weekend or longer courses set at specific venues.
- Usually have a fee attached.
- Members will need to complete and agree a training request form.
- Especially where the fee is significant, Members will need to show a direct benefit to their specific role at the Council.
- Also provide access to relevant Councillor Hubs and e-learning platforms.

4.20 Members Hub

- Used as a depository of presentations from training courses.
- Also used to present written guides and documents, videos and other sources of information that are useful for Members.
- Links to external organisations with training and information for Members

Publicising Learning and Development Opportunities

4.21 The primary method of communicating upcoming new Learning and Development opportunities to Members will be via the Member Bulletin email. This weekly email is sent to all Members (Mayor, Councillors, Co-Optees) and thus ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to express an interest, especially where there are limited places available (e.g. on external training).

4.22 In addition, when the Council arranges general training, an Outlook Calendar invitation will be circulated to all relevant Members. This will be used to determine levels of interest in a particular session. Members are asked to accept the invitation if they intend to come, tentatively accept if they may be able to come or decline if they are not attending. Active communication from

Members helps ensure sessions are provided appropriately (e.g. room size, refreshments etc).

- 4.23 In the week before the training session, Members will also receive a text message reminder (with a follow-up on the morning of the training session).

Cancelling Member Training Sessions

- 4.24 In general, member training sessions will only be cancelled where unexpected factors force a cancellation.

- 4.25 However, where less than 6 Members have indicated they will be attending a specific session, officers will determine whether the session will be cancelled through lack of interest. Factors to consider include:

- Whether an external training or other costs would be incurred.
- If the training is mandatory for some/all of those who have confirmed attendance.

- 4.26 Members will be informed through the cancellation of the Outlook Calendar invitation. This will be followed up by text and/or phone contact if the session is cancelled at short notice.

Member Responsibilities

- 4.27 Whilst Democratic Services will look to encourage and support Members to take up training there is also a responsibility for Members to take responsibility for their own Learning and Development. This includes:

- Reading and responding to invitations to training sessions (whether to accept, tentatively accept or decline)
- Completing training evaluation forms and providing useful feedback.
- Reading and considering the member training updates provided in the Member Bulletin and through emails.
- Proactively considering their own learning and development and taking advantage of other opportunities that come their way outside of the formal council Strategy.
- Making use of the resources available on the Members Hub.

5. Budgets and Resources

- 5.1 An annual budget of YYYY has been established to fund all internal and external Member development activities across all Members and groups including provision for the Individual Member Training Budgets.

- 5.2 Officer support is provided by Democratic Services. The Lead Officer is the Head of Democratic Services who is supported by the Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Members) and the Civic and Members team.
- 5.3 The Corporate Leadership Team Lead is the Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer who will ensure that there is corporate sign-off of the Member Learning and Development Strategy and cross-council engagement on an ongoing basis.

6. Evaluation of Member Learning and Development

- 6.1 As a strategic level the cross-party Member Learning and Development Working Group will be responsible for ensuring the effective evaluation of Member Learning and Development. Regular reports to the Working Group will be provided in respect of the effectiveness of learning and development delivered, Member uptake and value for money.
- 6.2 The Standards Advisory Committee will also be provided with an annual report on Member Learning and Development which will include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme over the past year and any recommendations for improvement.
- 6.3 Evaluation Forms will be provided at all Member Learning and Development sessions (and will be available from the Members Hub at all times) and Members will be encouraged to fill in the forms to ensure that any feedback can be properly recorded and considered.
- 6.4 Democratic Services will also attend all key Learning and Development Programme events to provide additional feedback on each session. Where Council Services provide Member Briefing Sessions they will be encouraged to provide their own feedback on the session in addition to providing feedback forms for Members to complete.
- 6.5 Where Members attend events, training, conferences etc at external locations (such as the LGA Leadership Academy or LGA Conference) or Member Seminars organised by the Council's Services they will be provided with a feedback form to provide comment on their experience.

4. Accessibility and Equalities

- 4.1 Member Learning and Development must be inclusive and fully accessible to all Members. This includes taking account of issues such as:
 - Types of Training

- Balancing Members' family and work commitments
- Religious and cultural events and holidays
- Venue and room accessibility (and features such as hearing loops)

Balancing Members' Family and Work Commitments

- 4.2 It is recognised that Members have family, work and community commitments and that their work/life balance is important. There are many demands on a Member's time of which Learning and Development is just one, no matter how important it is to a Member's role. It is therefore extremely important to ensure that training is offered in the most efficient way possible and that it provides flexibility to help Members balance its demands.
- 4.3 The Council will use the following strategies to support Members with these issues:
- Where possible all physical training sessions will be offered twice, once during the day and once in the evening.
 - Online/hybrid access will be made available where this is appropriate to the training session.
 - Presentations given at training sessions will be uploaded to the Members' Hub for all Members to view in their own time.
 - Where alternatives to physical training are available (such as online 'in your own time' courses) these will be publicised to Members.

Religious and Cultural Diversity

- 4.3 The Council is proud of its diverse community and recognises that Members have a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The Learning and Development Programme must work to ensure it is accessible to all Member.
- 4.4 The Council will therefore:
- Look to avoid scheduling training sessions which clash with major religious and cultural events and holidays.
 - Monitor attendance to try and identify any impact on engagement due to religious or cultural reasons and take mitigating actions.

Venue and Room Accessibility

- 4.5 Whilst some training is now available online, the majority of the Member Learning and Development programme will continue to feature in-person training sessions held at the Town Hall and/or other venues.
- 4.6 The Council is supportive of everyone who wishes to take on the role of Member including those who have accessibility issues. It is also recognised

that not all disabilities are visible or obvious to others and not all Members may wish to highlight their disabilities.

- 4.7 The Council will therefore by default for all in-person training look to:
- Encourage Members to highlight any relevant accessibility issues they may have.
 - Only use buildings and rooms that are fully accessible to those with mobility issues such as wheelchair users.
 - Looking to book training in rooms that provide Induction Hearing Loops or other similar technologies where possible and always where it is aware of a specific need.
 - Offering virtual/hybrid access to training where appropriate to the proposed session.

5. Reviewing and Revising the Strategy

- 5.1 The Member Learning and Development Strategy is agreed for each four-year electoral cycle.

Developing and Agreeing the New Strategy

- 5.2 The Strategy will be reviewed during the fourth year of each electoral cycle and will be revised and agreed before the end of that year. This review will include preparation of the Member Induction Plan to support Members after the elections.
- 5.3 The Strategy will also then be presented to Members immediately after the election for agreement by the new intake.

Developing and Agreeing the New Strategy

- 5.4 The Strategy will also be reviewed in Year Two of each electoral cycle to ensure it continues to meet with Member requirements.