

Strategic Framework for Elected member Development in Belfast City Council

2024 - 2027





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Elected Member Development in Belfast City Council

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Our elected members actively serve the communities they represent and the city of Belfast as a whole. Our ability to deliver value for money services and add real value to the leadership of the city depends on our commitment to provide continuous learning and development for our elected members to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.
- 1.2 The purpose of this document is to set out the Council's approach to member development.
- 1.3 We recognise the complex and ever-changing environment impacting on members' roles and responsibilities as well as the diverse range of knowledge and experiences which they bring to the Council. The aim of this strategic framework is to ensure the Council provides a range of learning and development opportunities linked to the skills and knowledge members need to carry out their duties and deliver on the objectives and priorities set out in our corporate plan and the Belfast Agenda.
- 1.4 It focuses on, but is not limited to, induction of new members, training in roles and responsibilities, addressing individual development needs identified through the personal development planning process as well as any development needs identified at party or Council level. The Council provides dedicated resources for this commitment to be fulfilled.
- 1.5 Access to learning and development opportunities is available to all elected members. In support of this, we seek to provide opportunities in ways which best suit the needs of members taking account of their wide range of other commitments and learning styles.

2. Strategic Context

- 2.1 Learning and development is an important tool for councils, councillors and officers to deliver what our communities need. Inspiring local communities and ensuring the wellbeing of the people and places we represent takes ambitious leadership – and effective political leadership is at the heart of a healthy democracy; with councillors who are well equipped, supported and resilient in times of challenge or change.
- 2.2 The role of a councillor is a unique, complex, yet privileged position that can make a real difference to people's lives by focussing on improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing.
- 2.3 Effective councillors can help make the changes that are needed locally in their own areas. More than ever before, councillors' roles as political, civic and community leaders require visible, responsive and resilient leadership as they advocate on behalf of residents, work accountably and innovatively and help shape places in which people want to live, work and play.
- 2.4 Democracy and decision-making are strengthened when councillors are empowered to speak to, and for, communities and to support the effective business of local government. If we are to continue to meet the expectations of those we serve, in an



ever-changing world, we need to make sure we have the skills and expertise to carry out our duties.

- 2.5 The NILGA Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus provides Belfast City Council with a robust framework, that is flexible to local needs, ensures effective leadership, equips members with the support they need, and provides resilience in times of challenge. Continuous review and improvement of our elected member development activity and processes helps ensure that we continue to meet the development needs of our elected members. Continuous assessment against the Charter requirements ensures that we are taking the right approach and doing the right things.

3. Leadership Commitment and Governance

- 3.1 Our Party Group Leader Consultative Forum (PGLCF) provides leadership and direction to ensure member development is member led and includes members from all party groups. Our Corporate Management Team (CMT) provide leadership to create a culture of member development allocating and managing sustainable resources and budget to develop a Member Development Strategic Framework that supports the delivery of the Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan.
- 3.2 The PGLCF and CMT are supported by a team of officers headed by the Director of Human Resources, HR Manager and a Principal HR Advisor who can provide guidance on learning and development and who will liaise with other senior officers of the council to ensure development is focused on both strategic and operational learning interventions including study and best practice visits.
- 3.3 The PGLCF will review this framework regularly including budget allocation with any proposed changes presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources committee. Development activity is appropriately resourced including officer support and co-ordination and reported to Corporate Management Team and Strategic Policy Resources Committee.
- 3.4 The PGLCF will be champions for and promote the development of elected members and will review and consider the elements of this strategy by taking a leading role in helping the council maintain a high standard of member development which continues to support the delivery of the Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan and meet the Charter Plus status accreditation requirements. Party leaders will ensure that all members are involved in and endorse our approach to member development.

4. Member Development Framework

- 4.1 The Elected Member Development Framework ensures that capacity building activities and programmes are in place to support elected members in undertaking their various roles.
- 4.2 It includes:
- a) Bespoke **Elected Member Role Profiles** - these set out the role(s), and responsibilities that elected members undertake as both a local representative and as a civic leader. It will support members to consider how they take up and carry out different roles and responsibilities. Its purpose is to help members reflect on changes they want to make to better serve their constituents.



- b) A bespoke **Members' Knowledge and Skills Framework**- this sets out the knowledge, skills, qualities and behaviours elected members must demonstrate, in order to enact the role(s) of elected members effectively.
- c) A personal development planning (PDP) process.
- d) An Assistance to Study Scheme
- e) An ongoing programme of member development
- f) A Member Development Evaluation Framework

5. Members' Personal Development Plan (PDP) Process

- 5.1 There is an agreed approach for developing elected member Personal Development Plans (PDPs). This includes the process for elected members to follow if they wish to access their PDP budget to complete individual learning and development activities.
- 5.2 The approach involves a number of stages all of which will be coordinated by Corporate Human Resources in liaison with individual members. This will ensure members' needs are aligned to the Role Profiles and Knowledge and Skills Framework which will be reviewed to determine appropriate and relevant learning and development activities.
- 5.3 On completion of individual PDPs Corporate Human Resources will complete a training needs analysis for elected members to identify emerging common learning and development themes.
- 5.4 Simultaneously, individual needs will be reviewed to determine appropriate and relevant learning and development activities aligned to the elected members' Role Profiles and Knowledge and Skills Framework.

The PDP Guidance Notes and the template plan is available at APPENDIX C and D

6. Members' Assistance to Study Scheme

- 6.1 Members can, on a part-time basis, undertake accredited courses of study resulting in recognised qualifications which will support them in their role and further enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities in an effective and capable manner. Members' individual Personal Development Plans (PDPs) are the means by which learning and development needs are identified and will include the suggested activities/interventions to meet these.
- 6.2 This scheme sets out the guidelines for approving requests from members to undertake part-time study and outlines the assistance available. All applications under the Members' Assistance to Study Scheme must lead to an accredited qualification. Otherwise, all other individual learning and development requests will be progressed using the approved Members' PDP process.

The Assistance to Study guidance and application form is available at APPENDIX E



7. Member Development Budget

- 7.1 Each elected member has access to an individual personal development budget, currently £730 per member per financial year. This provides a total of £2,920 which can be used at any time during the 4-year council term.
- 7.2 This budget can be used for a part time accredited course of study as above or for development opportunities identified in a PDP.
- 7.3 Further detail on conditions of assistance can be found in the scheme at APPENDIX E

8. Member Development Activity

- 8.1 The Chief Executive, Corporate Management Team, Corporate HR and officers across all departments have a role in facilitating elected member development in Belfast City Council. We do this to build capacity and to support members to understand the needs of our city and translate those needs into improved local services.
- 8.2 Member development will also be delivered through learning and development activities, events and visits, and by providing resources directly to elected members.
- 8.3 There are four strands to this part of our work:
 - 1. **Induction Programme** which includes support from a network of council officers. This is also available as a refresher to all returning members.
 - 2. **Ongoing programme of development activity** - to address specific needs identified from the personal development planning process or other initiatives /strands of work including those identified by members themselves.
 - 3. Participation in committees, area working groups and additional development activities provided by key council officers and community partners, including briefings, study visits, research and consultations.
 - 4. Support from partner organisations, such as NILGA, APSE and NAC and the NI Public Services Ombudsman to deliver learning opportunities and provide resources for elected members in areas where they have expertise and experience. These relationships also offer peer networking opportunities across local government in NI.
- 8.4 All elected members regardless of length of service, party membership or post held within the council will be given access to member development opportunities, be that as a collective group of members through workshops and information sessions or an individually tailored development intervention to address a personal development need identified through the PDP process.
- 8.5 It is however recognised that not all elected members may be able to access these training opportunities in the same way due to work/family/personal circumstances. Officers will look to provide training opportunities where appropriate, out with working hours and also look to online training sessions to allow elected members to access these resources at a time and place that is best for them.
- 8.6 Corporate HR will deliver or provide access to development activities on an ongoing basis and members will be invited to attend planned sessions and workshops or specific training



can be arranged. Examples of some of the training subjects that can be provided or sourced are outlined in the table below,

Code of Conduct for Elected members including Registration and Declaration of Interests	Recruitment and Selection
Local Government Employee & Councillor Working Relationship Protocol	Safeguarding - Keeping Children & Adults Safe
NILGSC Guidance on Social Media Use	Chairing Skills
Planning Training for Planning Committee Members	Equality & Diversity Awareness
Audit & Risk Training	Mediation Training
Local Government Finances	Mental Health First Aid
Disability Awareness	Managing Stress
Diversity Awareness	Decision Making & Problem Solving
Health & Safety Training	Influencing and Negotiation Skills
GDPR	Personal Effectiveness
Programme for Government	Place Shaping
Climate Change / Net Zero	Regeneration
Environment /Sustainability	City & Growth Deals
Housing	Poverty
Cyber Security	Economic Development

Other External Programmes & Resources available to members include:

NILGA www.nilga.org Regional Elected member Development Programme
NILGA Accredited Planning & Leadership Programmes
Local Government Association www.local.gov.uk
APSE Training Courses www.apse.org.uk
NAC Councillor Resources www.nac-ni.org
BCC Women's Leadership Programme
Advice NI www.adviceni.net
Housing Rights www.housingrights.org.uk
Study Visits
Best Practice & Benchmarking

This is not an exhaustive list and if a member has a particular request please contact corporate HR, contact details below.



9. Evaluating Member Learning and Development

- 9.1 Members attending learning and development activities will be requested to complete an evaluation form to establish the effectiveness of the activity and to ensure that it is fit for purpose and to inform decisions about future attendance by other members.
- 9.2 The views of members and senior officers will also be sought regularly to facilitate more effective evaluation of the impact of the council's investment in this area and the impact on our communities.

10. Further Information and Advice

If you have any queries, please contact Corporate HR at

memberdevelopment@belfastcity.gov.uk

Or the following officer for any queries you may have regarding elected member learning and development: Fiona Gunning, Principal HR OD Advisor, Tel: 02890 320202 ext. 6321 email: or gunningf@belfastcity.gov.uk

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APPENDICES