

**st  
albans**



**Councillor development strategy  
2016-2017**



**city and district council**

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## **Foreword**

The expectations of local councillors are higher than they have ever been. The people St Albans City and District Council works for want their authority to deliver high quality services, to be run and managed well and to respond quickly and meaningfully to changing demands. This means that councillors have to be effective in their roles – such as governance, local representation, detailed knowledge of law and policy – and knowledgeable about services. To ensure that councillors are successful in their roles, training and development cannot be sidelined or treated as an optional activity. Every councillor has a responsibility to ensure that their skills are regularly updated, and will be supported in doing this. This strategy sets out the ways in which councillors will be supported, including the types of training given, the variety of methods used and how the training programme is evaluated.

**Councillor Beric Read**

**Portfolio Holder, Community Engagement and Support**

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# **1 Aim of the strategy – why do councillors need training and development**

The Council's aims and priorities for the next five years are set out in the Corporate Plan 2016-2021. The vision and commitments included in the Corporate Plan provide direction for the Council's work. Councillors in St. Albans City and District Council (SADC) need high quality training and development to be able to carry out their roles effectively. The Corporate Plan's aims and priorities are as follows:

1. Protecting the vulnerable and delivering for families.
2. Planning for the future.
3. Developing business and the visitor economy.
4. Delivering cultural, sports, leisure and heritage facilities.
5. Keeping the District clean, green, healthy and safe.
6. Ensuring value for money and outstanding customer service.

The vision and priorities require that members have appropriate skills to carry out their work of taking decisions and monitoring the Council's work. The cross-departmental nature of SADC's work means that members need to have information on a variety of subject areas, as well as how the council works and how decisions are taken. Members are also supported in a variety of ways to enable them to function at a high level as community leaders. This support takes the form of traditional training sessions, such as Charing Skills, involving presentations and role play, as well as more practical 'on the ground' training such as police 'ride alongs'. In addition, councillors need to respond to external issues such as changing societal and demographic needs, different ways in which public sector organisations work (such as partnerships) and changes in the law relating to local government. Councillors also need to be able to deal effectively with casework arising from the work they carry out as community leaders within their wards.

Training and development is important for all members; those who are newly elected as well as the more established members. Induction for new members is crucial as they begin their roles and equips new members with the tools that will help them be an effective councillor. Whilst existing councillors have more experience, continued training helps to ensure an updated skill set.

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St Albans City and District Council is committed to achieving the Member Development Charter by the end of 2016. The authority was successful in achieving the Charter in 2011 and since then has been working towards being re-assessed. The Charter consists of three elements:

1. Commitment to Member development
2. Strategic approach to Member development
3. Member learning and development plan in place.

Achieving these elements will help members develop a range of skills to assist them in their work within the community and within the council. In particular this strategy aims to support all members to achieve the six core competencies highlighted in the Political Skills Framework:

1. Local leadership

Characteristics: engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern. Mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing all sections of the community.

2. Partnership working

Characteristics: builds positive relationships by making others feel valued, trusted and included, and by working collaboratively to achieve goals. Maintains calm and focus, recognises when to delegate or provide support, and is able to take a long-term view in developing partnerships.

3. Communication skills

Characteristics: listens sensitively, uses appropriate language and checks for understanding. Communicates regularly with individuals and groups in the community, speaks clearly and confidently in public and makes sure that people are informed.

4. Political understanding

Characteristics: acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decision-making or actions. Works across group boundaries without compromising values or ethics.

5. Scrutiny and challenge

Characteristics: acts as a critical friend by seeking opportunities for scrutiny and providing constructive feedback. Analyses information quickly and presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily accessible way.

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## 6. Regulating and monitoring

Characteristics: understands and executes judicial role by following protocol, evaluating arguments and making decisions that balance public needs and local policy. Ensures progress by monitoring and intervening where necessary.

## 2 Planning for training

To help strategic planning of training activity, the member development steering group meets three times a year. This group has cross-party member representation and is also attended by relevant officers. It considers issues relevant to member development and training, including progress towards the Member Development Charter.

SADC has delivered a pilot of a Personal Development Plan (PDP) project involving the member development steering group. PDPs consist of individual interviews to plan training and development, and to target specific areas which that member feels will add value to their role. Following the pilot, a decision will be made as to whether PDPs will be made available to members on a wider scale.

Development opportunities are planned to fit in with family and caring responsibilities as far as possible. Members have expressed a preference for evening meetings and for face to face training. Where possible and available, paper based or electronic training materials are also made available, as detailed in the next section.

Another function of the steering group is to provide the opportunity for having a dedicated training representative from each political group. The aim of this is to help liaison and communication between the political groups on training and development issues where relevant and appropriate. It is recognised, for example, that groups will organise specific training for their members at a local and national level, which SADC officers will not always be aware of. Knowledge of this is important in planning and developing activities within SADC.

Member training is raised through the Chief Executive's Board of SADC. This provides a way of senior officers to monitor councillors' training needs for the future, themes and modes, training gaps and how to fill them. Planning of training delivery is done by Member and Mayoral Services, in conjunction with service departments where relevant.

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### 3 Training delivery

A comprehensive induction programme is offered to all new members following their election to office. New members are supplied with a briefing pack on election night summarising the functions of the council and the role of members. Initially they are invited to an evening introduction session to meet with the Chief Executive and the Heads of Service. The following week they are invited to a weekend induction session which covers the council's constitution, financial regulations, budget, code of conduct and role of members.

Members are informed of training opportunities they can attend in the following ways:

- members' information bulletin
- newsletters and emails
- flyers
- group meetings where relevant

Internal and external delivery of training is conducted as relevant, depending on the topic, expertise in house and numbers of councillors wanting to attend. Where possible and appropriate, training is delivered by departmental officers based on positive feedback from members. Where external trainers are used, they are chosen for their knowledge of the subject as well as experience in training delivery and working with elected representatives. Cost effectiveness is always considered during the planning and evaluation stages. When training is planned, content is matched to data collected on training needs evaluation, as described in the above section.

External training courses and conferences are advertised to members as relevant, whilst guarding against information overload. Training opportunities are also planned with neighbouring local authorities and partner organisations, for example a recent seminar on Standards and the Code of Conduct included parish councillors. A partnership working package has been made available to members and includes the opportunity for a 'ride along' with the Hertfordshire Constabulary and with Veolia, who provide SADC's waste contract services.

We recognise that councillors are busy people and have many demands on their time. SADC therefore endeavours to provide training materials in a variety of forms. Examples include DVDs, audio CDs and paper manuals. A library of resources is available to members in the members area outside the political group rooms in the council offices.

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Member webpages are under development which, when finished, will contain a collection of electronic resources and relevant briefings to assist members in their roles.

A training session on social media is scheduled for delivery during the 2016-2017 municipal year. Advice on social networking is available on request and in particular, members are advised to note the following principles particularly when updating their Facebook pages or blogs:

Where a member uses a social media account both as a councillor and as an individual, members should make it clear in which capacity they are posting. It is understood that members will communicate on political issues. However, there is a difference between communicating on behalf of the Council and blogging as a private citizen. Online activity is subject to the Member Code of Conduct wherever a member gives the impression that he/she is acting as a councillor, whether or not the member is in fact acting in an official capacity.

Members should comply with the general principles of the Member Code of Conduct in what they publish and what they allow others to publish. Members are advised to:

- treat others with respect. Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.
- comply with equality laws. Take care in publishing anything that might be considered sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith.
- refrain from publishing anything received in confidence.
- do not bring the Council, or your Councillor role into disrepute.

In particular members are reminded always to have due regard to the nine characteristics which are protected under the Equality Act 2010.

## **4 Evaluation**

Training is systematically evaluated in a number of ways. Individual programmes are evaluated through questionnaires for all participants immediately after an event via an electronic 'Survey Monkey' link. Members' views are sought on other methods of training (e.g. paper/web based) as far as possible, along with breadth of subject provision and views on modes of delivery. People are also asked their views on useful subjects to include in the future.

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Work is also being planned with individual councillors to assess effectiveness of training. As mentioned above, plans for personal development planning will allow individuals to comment on how their training increases their personal effectiveness in their councillor role. Exit interviews are conducted with councillors to assess, among other issues, how well they were supported in their roles while serving.

An overview of training and support activity is achieved by reporting to the Chief Executive's Board of the Council

## **5 Resources and support**

This strategy will be delivered by Member and Mayoral Services with input from Human Resources and other officers where appropriate (e.g. Policy, IT). Training and development for members is supported financially through a training budget of approximately £10,000 pa which includes attendance at external conferences.

### **Acknowledgements**

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