



 STAFFORDSHIRE
moorlands
DISTRICT COUNCIL
AIMING FOR EXCELLENCE

Overview of
Role of a district
councillor within
local government

and the
Elected member
induction
programme 2007



Your role

This leaflet briefly describes the role of a councillor and the democratic process, including guidelines for elected members.

It also outlines details of the comprehensive Elected Member Induction Programme which has been developed to help to prepare newly elected councillors, for their changing roles and future challenges as they embark on their role within the council.

Your role

As a councillor, you would have the opportunity to make a significant difference for your constituents, which could be very rewarding.

Your primary role would be to represent the ward and the individual citizens who live within it by:

- *holding surgeries and resolving issues for your constituents*
- *representing the community and developing links with community groups and incorporating these links into your role on the Council*

As well as being a local champion, you would have other duties which will be explained to you following the election.





The democratic process

Decision-maker

As a member of the full council you will collectively make decisions on the budget and policy matters of the council.

Executive councillors

Cabinet members can make certain decisions without requiring further approval.

Overview and scrutiny

- *Providing a check on the activities of the executive*
- *Policy development*
- *Scrutiny reviews through task and finish groups*
- *External scrutiny*

Regulator

You may have a quasi-judicial role on committees appointed directly by the council, e.g. Planning Committee and Licensing Committee.

The Planning Committee exercises powers and duties relating to Town and Country Planning or building control issues. The Licensing Committee determines applications, claims and appeals in respect of the licensing functions and other legislation.

Community engagement

Elected members act as community leaders within their wards and as a part of the Scrutiny process are encouraged to raise issues and concerns of their constituents. Members will also undertake some direct consultation throughout the Staffordshire Moorlands as part of their scrutiny review work to enable them to produce evidence based recommendations.



Partnership working

It is very important now that the authority works effectively with other organisations as a partnership to ensure delivery of good service to the community. Elected members are involved in monitoring and evaluating these partnerships.

Outside bodies

By representing the authority on outside bodies you will have a chance to influence a wider agenda and learn how other organisations work. You may represent the council as a school governor or serve on a management committee of a voluntary organisation.

Declaration of Acceptance of Office

Newly elected councillors will be required to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office, in the presence of the chief executive of the council. This will take place after election day.

Constitution of the council and Code of Conduct

The Constitution includes protocols for members and also sets out the terms of reference of the council's committees, panels and cabinet. This document also includes the procedures for committees and panels.

Every authority is required to adopt a Code of Conduct that sets out rules governing the behaviour of its members. All elected, co-opted and independent members of local authorities, including parish councils, fire, police and national parks authorities, are covered by the code.

The Code of Conduct covers areas of individual behaviour such as members not abusing their position. There are rules governing disclosure of interest and withdrawal from meetings where members have relevant interests. Members are also required to record on the public register their financial and other interests.

You will sign up to observe the Code of Conduct and will also be required to complete a criminal records bureau check.



Strategies of the council

As with any large organisation we carry out a good deal of work with partner organisations. The main focus of this work is the Community Strategy.

Developed with a range of organisations such as the Primary Care Trust. The Police Service, and the voluntary sector, the Community Strategy ensures that key public services are co-ordinated and delivered in an efficient manner.

The activity detailed in the 2006/2007 Corporate Plan represents SMDC's contribution to the Community Strategy.



Aiming for Excellence

“Aiming for excellence in services and the community” summarises our desire to make further improvements in the delivery of cost effective services.

Having undertaken extensive consultation with the people of Staffordshire Moorlands through such means as the General Survey, focus groups and questionnaires, we know that we need to make progress in:

- *Providing accessible and continually improving services*
- *Creating a better place for people to live in, work in, and visit*
- *Listening and leading in the community*

While we are committed to improving all our services, customers identified four areas as being particularly important. We have called these our key priorities. These are where we will work in conjunction with partner organisations to deliver the most significant improvements.

The four key priorities are to:

- *Reduce Health Inequalities*
- *Provide Affordable Housing*
- *Improve Community Safety*
- *Regenerate the three Market Towns*



Forward Plan of key decisions

We produce a Forward Plan of key decisions for up to 4 months ahead. This plan identifies all the key decisions that the cabinet are going to make for up to 4 months ahead. This is a tool to allow members of the public to input into the decision-making processes.

Agendas and minutes for meetings

By law, a Public Notice of a meeting with its date, time, venue and agenda must be posted publicly five clear days before the meeting takes place. The agendas for meetings will be circulated to you at the same time. If there are any issues of interest to you or of concern to your ward and you are not a member of that committee, you can attend the meeting as an observer. You can also ask to speak but you cannot vote unless you are a member of the committee. For all formal meetings, minutes are taken and made available to the public.

Preparation for meetings is very important and councillors are advised to read the agenda and any attached papers before the meeting. All agendas and minutes are available electronically via the council's website.

Working with the media

This council employs communications professionals who will be able to give you advice and media training is also arranged.

Allowances/support for members

You will not get a salary but you will be entitled to receive a members allowance and other allowances e.g child care allowances and claim expenses. The council also provides other kinds of support such as stationery and business supplies and ICT equipment as required.

The Democratic Services team also provide ongoing support to all members throughout their term of office.



What time commitment is involved?

Described below is what a councillor may become involved in, based on feedback from current elected members:-

“The diary of a councillor”

Every day, every week is different — due in part to the cycle of meetings. Presently, the full council meets approximately every 6 weeks. Cabinet, overview & scrutiny panels and committees work on different cycles because of the nature of their business. Also you may be involved in a working group undertaking a scrutiny review e.g. transport services in the Moorlands — this may meet once a month.

Other duties include:-

- *Checking e-mails, dealing with casework and corresponding with residents each day;*
- *Attending monthly parish council meetings in the ward and holding a ‘surgery’ which allows residents to raise issues face to face at a set time and place;*
- *Communicating with residents via the telephone;*
- *Research and preparation for meetings;*
- *Attending council meetings (from full council on a Thursday evening or Saturday morning to working groups for an overview & scrutiny panel, training sessions or briefing meetings with officers).*



Member learning and development

Our commitment

It is vitally important that all elected members are given the opportunity to develop their knowledge and learn new skills to promote partnership working and community engagement in order to become an effective ward councillor and lead a modern and progressive district council.

They are encouraged to engage in activities to further both their professional and personal development, which in turn will help the authority to achieve its key corporate priorities. Member development should not stand alone but be recognised as an integral part of the council's business.

West Midlands Member Development Charter

Member learning and development has always been valued as a priority by this council and by the successful achievement of the West Midlands Member Development Charter in November 2005, this ensures that the commitment remains in place.

The purpose of this charter is to improve the performance of local authorities through the development of its elected members and provide for exciting and innovative initiatives.

Staffordshire Moorlands Member Development Strategy

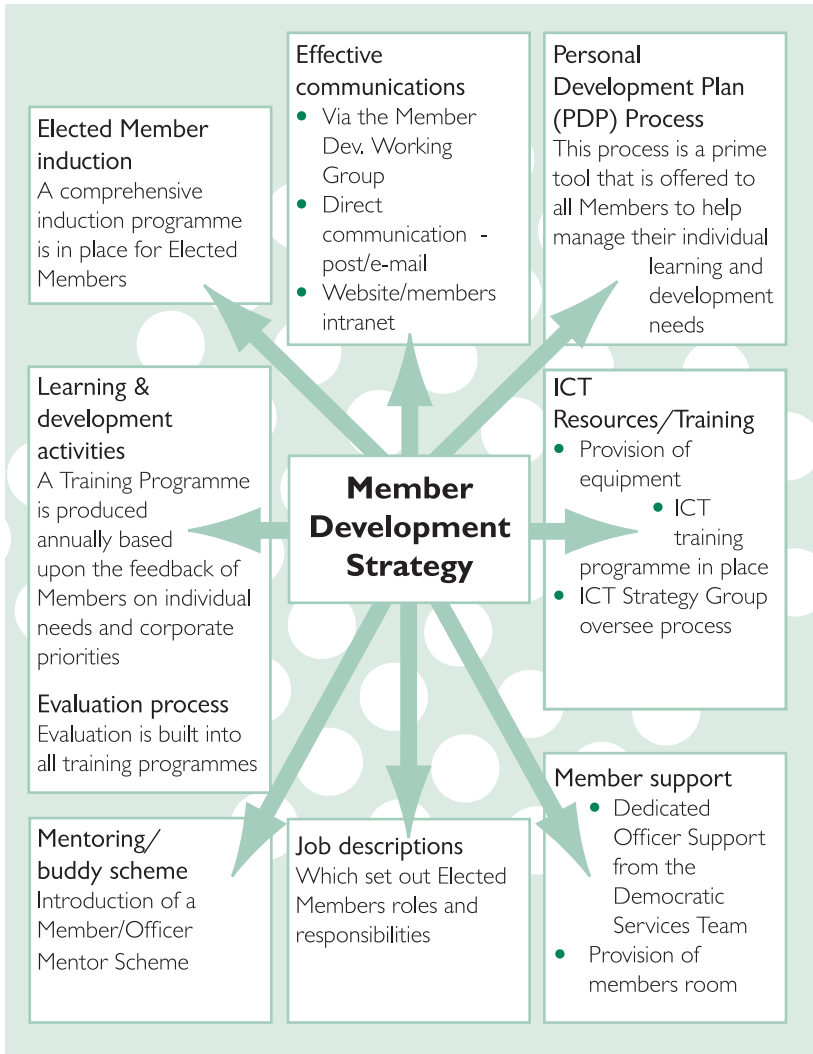
The foundation for an effective member development process is the implementation of a comprehensive and deliverable strategy. The council's Member Development Strategy has been developed in line with the West Midlands Member Development Charter requirements and sets out what we want to achieve and how we intend to do it.

The strategy has the full commitment of a Member Development Working Group who lead the process and ensure compliance with the council's corporate priorities and the standards within the charter.



Member development process

The key processes identified in our Member Development Strategy are illustrated below:-





Induction programme

It is important that all elected members receive an effective introduction to the authority and what it does. The induction programme is part of the annual training programme for 2007. It will begin the week commencing 7th May 2007. This will be fully supported by senior officers of the council and the democratic services team.

Declaration of Acceptance of Office

All elected members will be required to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the chief executive.

Induction packs

As part of the process all elected members will receive an induction pack. This will be available both hard copy and electronically.

This will include essential information about:-

- *The role of county/district and parish councils and partnership links;*
- *The elected member's roles and responsibilities*
- *Policies and procedures/protocol at meetings*
- *Entitlements*
- *Individual service areas of the council*






Various meetings/training sessions

All elected members will be invited to attend the following during the first three months of the induction programme:-

- *Welcome meetings at which the chief executive, corporate directors and heads of service will be present. These will cover a brief introduction to how the authority works and provide an opportunity to get to know your fellow councillors and senior officers of the council. Presentations will be delivered on:-*
 - a *Key issues facing the council*
 - b *Key strategies: Community Strategy/Corporate Plan*
 - c *Partnership working/community cllr role*
 - d *Overview of ethics/standards*
 - e *Decision making structure and member support*

- *Specific licensing training for members elected onto the Licensing and Regulatory Committee*



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- *Specific planning training for members elected onto the Planning Committee*
 - *Tours of service areas — elected members will be introduced to the individual service areas to find out the responsibilities of the head of service and the main issues affecting the area*
 - *Member development workshops will be held to explain the significance of the Member Development Strategy and to give an overview of the Training and Development Programme scheduled to run through 2007*
 - *As part of the Personal Development Plan (PDP) process, an opportunity for an 'Induction Plan' to be prepared will be available to ensure that further training is tailored to individual needs*
 - *Structured programme of ICT training will be available which will provide an opportunity for elected members to learn new skills or reinforce existing ones.*

Overview & Scrutiny Panels

Brief pre-meeting welcome for newly elected councillors.





Induction programme 2007

(part of the annual training programme for 2007)

Provisional date	Activity
w/c 7 th May 2007	Meeting with chief executive to sign Declaration of Acceptance of Office
w/c 7 th May 2007	Welcome meetings
19 th May 2007	ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING
21 st May 2007	Planning training for members on Planning Application Committee
1 st June 2007	Licensing training for members on Licensing & Regulatory Committee
To be set	ICT Training Programme
w/c 18 th June 2007	Member development workshops
19 th June 2007	Ethics & standards training
29 th June 2007	Audit & Accounts Committee – bitesize briefing session
5 th July 2007	Overview & Scrutiny training
To be set	Local Development Framework training
23 rd July 2007	CPA/Performance Management - briefing session
27 th July 2007	Standards committee – bitesize briefing session
6 th September 2007	Finance training
26 th September 2007	Equalities, diversity, and social inclusion training
To be set	Media training
To be set	Risk awareness training
10 th October 2007	Sustainable development – raising awareness
29 th October 2007	Member/officer relationships training
9 th November 2007	Personal safety
27 th November 2007	Child protection training
18 th December 2007	Chairing skills

Please note: This is a 'provisional' programme – full programme details and dates still to be confirmed.



Staffordshire Plus Improvement Partnership 'Member Development' Training Programme

In addition to the council's own induction programme, elected members will also have the opportunity to participate in the Staffordshire Plus Improvement Partnership 'Member Development' Training Programme.



This is a joint venture of twelve local authorities working together to improve public services by strengthening skills in key areas and each council has been allocated an equal number of places for each session of the programme.

Key topics to be included are:-

- *Financial planning;*
- *Community & local leadership;*
- *Communication and influencing skills;*
- *Effective chairing;*
- *Project management;*
- *Scrutiny functions;*
- *Member officer roles and relations;*
- *Being a frontline member.*

This will provide members with an opportunity to meet councillors from other authorities and share learning experiences.



Further information

If you would like further information on any issues contained in this leaflet, or more details on specific role descriptions for councillors, you can either:-

Visit the council's website at www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk or contact the officers named below, who will be pleased to discuss any issues with you:-

Wendy Thompson,
Scrutiny & Committee Services Manager
01538 483473



Jean Redfern,
Members Support Officer
01538 483739



Susan Barratt,
Employee/Member Training Co-ordinator
01538 483412



This document is available in alternative
formats on request



Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Moorlands House,
Stockwell Street, Leek, Staffordshire Moorlands ST13 6HQ
Telephone: 01538 483474 www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk