



CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Member Development Panel

Annual Report

2024-25

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Foreword

Councillor Jackie Chelin, Chair of Member Development Panel



As Chair, it is my pleasure to commend the 2024-25 Member Development Panel (MDP) report to you.

The role of a local councillor is becoming more challenging which means that the skills required by councillors to fulfil their roles are both increasing in number and diversity. Cheltenham Borough Council is committed to ensuring that Members have access to the learning and development they need to perform effectively in their vital role in representing residents and taking decisions on behalf of the community.

Please note that this annual report covers up to the point that the Council received Member Development Charter Status in May 2025.

I am grateful for the support of the Democratic Services team who share the enthusiasm of the MDP in seeking ways to enhance practice, both in addressing regular training and development needs as well as responding to specific requirements within the changing external context.

Councillor Jackie Chelin

December 2025



Councillor development

'Learning and development for councillors is vital for councils to deliver what our communities need. At the heart of healthy local democracy is effective political leadership – with councillors who are well-equipped, supported, resilient, and confident to make a difference.'

Introduction

The Member Development Panel (MDP) was established in June 2023 as a cross-party group, fully supported by the Council Leader, political group leaders and the Council's Leadership Team. It meets every quarter and has an agreed work plan.

Its role is reflected in the Terms of Reference for the year in question, which are reproduced in Appendix 1 for information.

Members

- Councillor Jackie Chelin (Chair)
- Councillor Ashleigh Davies
- Councillor Dr Helen Pemberton

CBC Officer leads:

- Claire Hughes, Director of Governance, Housing and Communities
- Bev Thomas, Democratic Services Team Leader
- Claire Morris, Democracy Officer

The panel met four times between April 2024 and May 2025:

- 4 October 2024
- 17 January 2025
- 04 April 2025
- 23 May 2025 (Councillor Development Charter Assessment)

On the pages that follow is a summary of work undertaken in 2024-25.

Member Development Strategy

The Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge of July 2023, recommended that the council improve Member Induction to help Members to understand their roles and responsibilities.

The Member Development Panel, then in its infancy, reviewed the overall position in respect of learning and development activities for Members. It embarked on preparing a strategy to set out the council's approach more formally, to ensure that there was a member-led framework for continuous development. This was approved by [Council in December 2024](#).

The overarching aim of the strategy is to ensure there is support to enable all Members to acquire sufficient knowledge and a full range of skills to maximise their ability and capacity.

The objectives of the strategy are:

- to ensure all Members have consistent and equal access to training and development opportunities, taking into account different learning preferences;
- to provide support for all Members to acquire sufficient knowledge and a full range of skills to fulfil all their duties confidently and effectively;
- to ensure mechanisms are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the development programme;
- to achieve South West Council's Charter Status accreditation for Councillor Development.

The strategy sets out the approach towards continuous development, methods of delivery, feedback and evaluation and performance measures. The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy underpins how the Member Development Plan is designed and delivered.

The Member Development Strategy is kept under review by the MDP and will be refreshed in 2027.

Member Induction 2024

Member Handbook

A Member Handbook was produced for the first time for May 2024's all-out elections, and distributed to new and returning Members upon election. Together with the Open Day and induction plan, its aim is to support new Members in particular as they get to know the council, providing a comprehensive guide to what the council does, how it works, and what being a councillor involves. Its user-friendly format covers a wide range of subjects, from the constitution and code of conduct, decision-making process and the Corporate Plan to the Council Budget, information handling and what the various committees do. It also includes basic but important advice on key contacts, committee etiquette, dress code, Members' allowances and more. Feedback from all Members was extremely positive, and the handbook will be updated to coincide with each election.

Member Induction Plan

Alongside the drafting of the Member Development Strategy, the MDP developed a comprehensive Member Induction Plan. Rolled out over several months, this consisted of a wide range of sessions providing overviews and legislative and policy updates to all key council areas, with mandatory training highlighted. Members are made aware that training attended is logged on their public profile on the council's website.

Post induction, a full member questionnaire was developed by the MDP, feedback from which has been considered by the MDP in order to improve the member development plan and councillor induction going forward. The MDP had hoped for a better response rate to the questionnaire (40%) but are grateful for the valuable input from those who did respond.

The MDP recognised that the member induction plan was quite intense and that a July general election increased the workload on Members, but they remain committed to finding the right balance of informing Members early on, without it feeling onerous or overwhelming.

Democratic Services consider the feedback alongside the MDP and for example have now introduced quarterly 'drop-in' general IT sessions for Members and an enhanced buddying system is being developed with the support of the leadership team.

The Councillor Development Charter



As a key objective in the Member Development Strategy, the council was delighted to have been awarded the Councillor Development Charter Status in May 2025.

What is the Councillor Development Charter?

The Councillor Development Charter exists to:

- encourage councils to develop an effective strategy or approach to councillor development;
- recognise those councils that have developed an effective approach;
- encourage councils to continue that development and share their experiences and learning.

There are three essential criteria for achieving the Charter:

- a clear commitment to councillor development and support;
- a strategic approach to councillor development;
- effective learning and development to build Members' skills and knowledge.

The charter provides councils with a robust framework and encourages member development across the sector. Achieving the Development Charter Status involved many hours of hard work to ensure that all the criteria were met or being worked towards.

The outcome was based on a self-assessment and evidence with final sign-off comprising assessment interviews with:

- Claire Hughes, Director of Governance, Housing and Communities
- Bev Thomas, Democratic Services Team Leader
- Councillor Jackie Chelin, Chair of the Member Development Panel
- Councillor Rowena Hay, Leader of the Council
- Councillors Mike Collins and Izaak Tailford, Cabinet Members
- Councillor Ashleigh Davies, Group Leader of the Green Party

The MDP thanks all those involved for their valuable contributions to achieve the charter.



At the LGA conference in July 2025, the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay, was presented with the Member Development Charter certificate by Councillor Bill Revans on behalf of South West Councils.

Key strengths highlighted in the Charter Assessment Report

- Commitment to Councillor Development: evident through interviews and active participation in induction sessions.
- Supportive culture: returning Councillors attending new Member inductions showed dedication to continuous learning.
- Strong officer-Member relationships: positive collaboration across roles.
- Effective buddying system: received highly favourable feedback.
- Diverse learning opportunities: a wide range of training and development options available, offered in a variety of formats(?).
- Councillor champion roles: seen as a proactive and empowering initiative.
- Members' Hub: valued as a flexible and accessible resource for councillors (see further information below).

Recommendations

The Charter Assessment Report also included a number of recommendations as to how the council can improve its member development and induction programme:

i. Buddy Scheme Enhancement

- Promote the buddy system continuously, not just during role changes.
- Encourage cross-party buddying, especially for smaller political groups.
- Extend the scheme beyond induction to support ongoing peer learning and leadership development.

ii. Champion Role Expansion

- Define the role more clearly to motivate councillors to share expertise and experiences.

iii. Training Improvements

- Cascade insights from formal external training (e.g., LGA courses) to maximise value.
- Address resistance to mandatory training that might have been taken in members' other working roles by emphasising its councillor-specific perspective and encouraging peer learning through shared experiences.

iv. Skills Audit Reintroduction

- Reintroduce a skills audit to identify gaps and transferable skills.
- Use audit results to tailor development plans.
- Encourage reflection on how professional experience outside the elected member role applies to councillor duties.

v. Partnership Learning

- Build on existing successful collaborations with external bodies (e.g., police, voluntary groups, other councils) to enrich councillor development.

Following the experience of the South West Council's accreditation process, the chair of the MDP has been invited to take part in a panel assessing another local Council that is also seeking to obtain the charter.

Members' Hub

Recognised by the charter assessment, the Members' Hub is a useful resource for all Members. Democratic Services always welcome feedback and any suggestions on how it can be improved.

The Members' Hub includes:

- links to useful documents and information
- key contact details
- advice
- training
- recordings of briefings

Members' Hub Home Useful Information Training Member Briefings Member Safety ... Edit Private group 85 members ...

+ New Page details Analytics Published 2/5/2025 Share Edit

Welcome to the Members' Hub

Key Links

- Cheltenham Borough Council**
Main homepage
- Latest News**
Latest news on Cheltenham Borough Council website
- Constitution**
Cheltenham Borough Council's constitution
- Key Member information**
Member information on intranet
- Committees & Working Groups**
Committees and working groups calendar on intranet
- Local Government Association**
Local Government Association - Councillor Hub
- Gloucestershire County Council**
Main homepage
- Highways - GCC**
Gloucestershire County Council Highways

Democratic Services

- Bev Thomas**
Democratic Services Team Leader
- Judith Baker**
Democracy Officer
- Claire Morris**
Democracy Officer
- Rhian Watts**
Democracy Officer

Full Meeting Calendar

In your area webpage

Customer Services

For general enquiries about the council. Requests for service for cleansing e.g. emptying bins, fly tipping and street cleaning.

Tel: 01242 262626
Email: enquiries@cheltenham.gov.uk

Member Training Budget

The panel is required to monitor the spend of the £5k member development budget and receive regular reports at their meetings. They also invite feedback from councillors who have attended relevant sessions. Recent examples of this include the LGA Effective Cabinet Member Training, Finance Without Numbers, and Enquiring and Evidence Gathering.

Looking Forward



The Member Development Panel will continue to meet regularly, and its future work will include:

- monitoring progress against the recommendations of the Councillor Development Charter Assessment;
- roll out of Mandatory Training 2025-2026, to include bespoke Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training;
- preparation, approval and delivery of a Member Induction Plan following the 2026 local elections.

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference of Membership Development Panel

Purpose

The Member Development Panel will act as a cross party and non-decision-making advisory body. Its role is to coordinate and prioritise a programme of ongoing Member training and help to encourage participation in Member Development opportunities. More widely it will examine the current provisions for Members in terms of support, training, and provision of information. The working group will also look at new Member Induction to ensure new Members are provided with support and are easily able to access information and relevant training.

Functions

The Member Development Panel will carry out the following functions:

- ensure that Councillor learning needs are met;
- ensure that the Member Development and Induction Programmes are owned and valued by members of the council;
- evaluate Member development to ensure that value is being added;
- create a Member Development Strategy;
- consider and review the current provision for Members in terms of support and information provision, including but not limited to the 'Members Hub';

consider whether to progress towards accreditation under the [SW charter for Member Development](#).

Roles and responsibilities of group members

- promote learning and development;
- seek views from Members and provide feedback on any training and development needs;
- advise on any targeting of resources and priorities;
- recommend ways of enhancing councillors' skills, knowledge, and attributes in order to fulfil their roles and responsibilities with the council and wider communities;
- monitor effective use and allocation of budget (£5,000 pa);

if agreed to progress towards the SW Charter for Member Development Panel members will support the achievement of the action plan and the meeting of criteria set out in the SW charter for Member Development.

Membership

The Panel will be cross-party, with its members drawn from across the whole Council

The working group members will be nominated by Group Leaders and will comprise **one** member from each political group.

Officers in the Working Group will comprise:

- Democratic Services Team Leader/Democracy Officer;
- Director of Governance, Housing and Communities;
- (as required).

Meeting Frequency and Papers

- The Panel will meet quarterly. Meetings may be held more often should the need arise, or be cancelled if there is not sufficient business, by agreement with the Chair.
- An agenda and supporting papers will be issued in a timely manner, ideally one week in advance of the meeting.
- Feedback to Group Leaders, and where appropriate Full Council, will be delivered by a nominated Councillor (usually the Chair of the Panel).