

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Member Development Strategy 2022 - 2027



*Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by
working with and for our communities*

Introduction	Page 1
Purpose	Pages 1 - 2
Legislative Framework for the Strategy	Page 3
Corporate Plan 2022/27	Pages 4 - 5
How the Strategy is Delivered	Pages 6 - 7
Roles and Responsibilities	Pages 8 - 9
Head of Democratic Services	
Support Arrangements Under the Head of Democratic Services	
Democratic Services Committee	
Political Group Leaders	
Political Groups	
Elected Members	
Directorates and Departments	
Welsh Local Government Association	
Monitoring of the Strategy	Page 9
Formal Monitoring	
Informal Monitoring	
Resourcing the Strategy	Page 10
Conclusion	Page 10

Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Introduction

The work of an Elected Member is complex and challenging and the political, legislative and local landscape in which they work is changing constantly. Members need to balance the expectations of local constituents against the challenges of effectively running a local authority in maintaining and delivering services effectively, and within budget.

Nationally, there is a drive for local authorities to raise the standard of support and development opportunities provided to Members, in order to assist them in meeting the challenges of their roles. The Welsh Government's Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, emphasises the need to secure the provision of reasonable training and development opportunities for Members.

Both new and experienced Members need appropriate support, information and professional development to undertake their complex and evolving roles. This Member Development Strategy has been developed to support all Members and aims to provide effective training and development opportunities to support Members to effectively deliver their challenging and demanding roles and to meet future challenges.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has a duty to and is committed to supporting the development of its Members. Members play a pivotal role in decision making and delivering better outcomes for citizens and the Council recognises that the provision of effective training and development is critical to this and its success.

Purpose

Member development refers to any development activities or training programmes specifically designed to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of Members in their varied roles.

The Council will provide Members with flexible and responsive training and development that is based on individual and organisational needs. All elected Members regardless of length of service, party membership or post held within the political framework will have equal access to training and development opportunities.

To assist Members to identify areas for development and understand their roles within the political framework, a number of supporting mechanisms have been established in order that Members have an understanding of the expectations placed upon them and an understanding of what the Council can do to support Members in these areas. As a result, Members will be encouraged to identify their own development needs via the Personal Development Review and Competency Framework process.

To ensure Members achieve the most from the development opportunities, Blaenau Gwent Council will provide effective, planned, appropriately resourced and evaluated training.

The objectives of the Strategy are:

- To equip Members with the necessary training and development opportunities to enable them to effectively undertake their different roles, and to enable the Council to deliver its priorities.
- To support the integrity of Members when working with the public by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge.
- An enhanced understanding and ownership of the Council's key priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan 2022/27.
- To provide an opportunity for Members to reflect on how they have demonstrated the relevant skills, knowledge and behaviours to support their personal development.
- To provide effective, planned, appropriately resourced, monitored and evaluated training.
- To establish an environment where Member development is seen as vital to the success of the authority.
- To make training and development available and encourage its take-up by all Councillors, irrespective of seniority, length of service or political affiliation.
- For Political Groups and Political Leaders to show commitment to the delivery and promotion of the Member Development Programme and encourage their Group Members to participate in these opportunities.
- Keeping Members up to date with new legislation and changing policies
- For Members to work to the values of the Council as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2022/27 by being: **Respectful; Inclusive; Collaborative; Accountable; and Supportive**

Legislative Framework for the Strategy

The **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011** requires Local Authorities to secure the provision of reasonable training and development opportunities for its Members. The Measure does not define what constitutes reasonable training and development. However, Welsh Government guidance recommends that Local Authorities provide opportunities for what is essential for a Member to perform their role effectively.

The **Wales Programme for Improvement** places a responsibility on the Council to maintain continuous improvement in service delivery, emphasising the need to develop new and innovative ways of working to improve service outcomes. All Members have a key role in the process of challenging established patterns of service delivery.

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** places a duty on public bodies, including the Council, to think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. Public bodies need to make sure that when making their decisions they take into account the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales in the future. Within this all Elected Members have a key role in providing leadership and representation within the local community.

The **Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021** requires that a leader of a political group must take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Group Members. The duty does not make leaders of a political group accountable for the behaviour of their Members' as conduct must be a matter of individual responsibility. However, they do have a role in taking reasonable steps in maintaining standards, setting an example, using their influence to promote a positive culture, being proactive in promoting high standards of conduct in their group and addressing issues as soon as they arise.

Corporate Plan 2022/27

The Corporate Plan is the Council's roadmap setting out our vision, values and priorities. Through focusing on delivering against the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan we can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area and this in turn plays a part on a regional and national stage. It is also a key part of building a more confident and capable Council. It is about achieving real outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent and is underpinned by solid and sustainable plans, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver. The Corporate Plan identifies four priorities, known as Well-being Objectives, which set out the direction for action and agenda for change over the next five years. The ambitions set out in this Plan require for the Council, communities and partners to work in new and innovative ways to drive change and transform the area in order to have a positive impact on the lives and well-being of current and future generations.

The Corporate Plan has not been developed in isolation and alignment has been made to the Marmot Principles (to reduce health inequalities across Gwent and to work in partnership with the Institute of Health Equity (IHE) to address the social determinants of health), and the priorities from the Gwent Public Service Board Plan (PSB) Well-being Plan.

The table below highlights the links between the Corporate Plan 2022/27, the Marmot Principles and the Gwent PSB's Well-being Plan.

Corporate Plan 2022/27	Plan	Marmot Principle	Gwent Well-being Plan
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give every child the best start in life. • Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives. • Create fair employment and good work for all. • Ensure a healthy standard of living for all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a fair and equitable Gwent for all 	
Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities. • Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention. • 'Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a Gwent where the natural environment is protected and enhanced 	
An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create fair employment and good work for all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a fair and equitable Gwent for all 	
Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a Gwent that has friendly, safe and confident communities 	

How the Strategy is Delivered

The training and development of Elected Members will be provided using a variety of different methods, including:

- A comprehensive **Induction and Refresher Training Programme** for all Elected Members, whether newly elected or returning this is provided at the start of each political cycle.
- The **Member Development Programme** is an ongoing and comprehensive learning and development programme to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of Elected Members in their varied roles. The programme will include topical and legislative information as well as being amended to cover identified need over the year.
- Members are provided with **Information Handbooks** to inform them of the various arrangements in place throughout the democratic processes.
- The **Personal Development Review and Competency Framework** enables a Member and the Council to mutually assess personal development needs. It is set within the context of the role of the Member, the priorities and expectations of the Council, the needs of the community and the personal aspirations the individual wishes to achieve. These will be offered to all Elected Members, however, they are only mandatory for Senior Salary Holders.
- The Council will encourage experienced Members of the Council to share their expertise and will encourage members to take advantage of any **Mentoring** arrangements offered. Arrangements can also be made to support mentees from other local authority areas or for mentors/peers in other local authorities to provide support.
- Support arrangements are in place for Elected Members who represent the Council on an **Outside Body or Organisation**. Elected Members should provide feedback on the work they have undertaken on the outside body as well as share any learning experiences.
- The establishment of **Role Descriptions and Core Competencies** as set out in the Constitution provide Members with clarity on expectations and accountability within their diverse roles.
- The **Forward Work Programmes** of Scrutiny, Governance & Audit, Cabinet and Council will be used to identify any learning and training opportunities that will support Elected Members to understand the work of the Council and its services.

- **Annual Reports for Members** - The Councillor's Annual Report is a voluntary process intended to be used as a mechanism for improving communication between Councillors and the local electorate and it helps to improve local people's knowledge and understanding of what their local councillor does, and the important role they undertake.
- **Modernising Local Government** – the Council has made a commitment to support Members to become more digitally inclusive.
- **Cost Effective** Member training and development will be sourced through the use of in-house training, cost-sharing with neighbouring authorities and outside providers.
- The Online **Member Support Library** is a dedicated area on the Council intranet which has been developed as a single point of contact for Elected Members to access in order to gain information on a wide range of areas and topics. Recordings from Member Development Sessions are also available on this portal.
- A range of **E-Learning Modules** are available to help develop Members' knowledge and understanding of local government and the broad issues that face them in their role. The modules will enable Members to undertake learning at a time that suits them, and, for some topics, will supplement the learning received through workshops and workbooks.
- The Council will **Record** all committee meetings which are open to the public. These recordings are available on the Council's website.
- The Council has available **Hybrid Meeting Options** to enable Elected Members to remote attend and participate in a meetings.
- The Council operate a number of **Mandatory Training** sessions which Elected Members are expected to attend:

For all Elected Members -

- Members Code of Conduct
- Corporate Parenting/Safeguarding Responsibilities

For Specific Elected Members -

- Licensing and Planning – for Elected Members appointed to these regulatory committees
- Appeal Committee Training - for Elected Members dealing with Dismissals

Roles and Responsibilities

In order to facilitate the effective delivery of training and development arrangements for Elected Members, support will include:

Head of Democratic Services

The Head of Democratic Services is to produce and monitor the Member Development Programme, to collate the learning and development needs of Elected Members and use these needs to inform the annual training programme and ongoing member development.

Support Arrangements under the Head of Democratic Services

The Corporate Performance Team, which includes both the Democratic Arrangements and Scrutiny functions, will support the Head of Democratic Services in the delivery of training and development for Members. Democratic Services will record attendance of Members at all training, committees and member development sessions. This ensures Elected Members can review their training and development activities.

Democratic Services Committee

The Democratic Services Committee has the responsibility for ensuring the democratic element of the Council is operating correctly including ensuring sufficient staff, accommodation and resources are available to support Members in their role. The Committee oversees the Council's Member Development arrangements and monitors the delivery of the programme and periodically assesses its effectiveness.

Political Group Leaders

Group Leaders have a particular responsibility to ensure that their Members engage fully in the Member Development process; recognising and proactively seeking out training opportunities.

Political Groups

Groups should promote member development opportunities and also encourage and support Members' participation.

Elected Members

Elected Members are responsible for:

- Identifying their own development needs.
- Seeking opportunities to improve their effectiveness and increase their potential.
- Attending arranged learning and development opportunities.
- Participating in the Personal Development Review / Competency Framework.
- Sharing their knowledge and skills with their peers.
- Reviewing their learning and development activities.

Directorates and Departments

All departments within the Council are responsible for identifying and delivering service specific training to Elected Members.

Welsh Local Government Association

Guidance, support and expertise will be used throughout the development of the Members' Programme, including use of the e-learning modules.

Monitoring of the Strategy

Ensuring that the Strategy remains fit for purpose and continues to meet the needs of Elected Members is essential. To ensure continued development and delivery of an effective training and development programme the following arrangements are in place:

Formal Monitoring

Progress of the Strategy will be monitored by the Democratic Services Committee.

There will be a formal review of the Strategy every five years.

Informal Monitoring

A record will be kept of the attendance of Elected Members at all training and development sessions. Members will be requested to complete an evaluation of each committee, training and development session which they attend. Feedback will be provided to facilitators following each session. This will be used to inform and adapt future events to ensure their ongoing effectiveness and strengthen the Member Development Programme.

Resourcing the Strategy

The majority of training is likely to be provided in-house but there is a specific budget available to support the training and development opportunities for Members. This sum also covers the costs of Members attending conferences which are deemed to be opportunities for development.

Conclusion

This Strategy has been developed in order to support Members with their development and learning. The Strategy will have a life-span of a political cycle, currently 5 years, at which point it will be reviewed at the beginning of the new electoral term.