Middlesbrough Council

Member Development Skills Framework for Councillors

DRAFT

Contents

Introduction

1.The Skills Framework supports the Member Development Policy; aims to assist Members to develop their leadership skills and knowledge in relevant disciplines; and it will provide them with the opportunities, experience and knowledge to meet the challenges and risks associated with the role of an elected member.

WHAT IS THE COMPETENCY SKILLS FRAMEWORK AND WHY HAS IT BEEN DEVELOPED?

2. The Competency Skills Framework, which has been developed in line with Local Government Association's Political Skills Framework, sets out the knowledge and skills required to enable members to be effective in their role as a Councillor.

3. It enables members to develop their knowledge and skills by providing the necessary training and support throughout their term as a Councillor.

The six core skills for Councillors

4. The six core competencies highlighted in the Political Skills Framework include:-

(i). **Local Leadership** – engaging with the community in order to learn, understand and deal with any issues of local concern. The Councillor should also be able to mediate between different residents/groups in the community, in a fair and constructive manner, encouraging trust from all sections of the community.

(ii). **Partnership working** – building positive relationships by making others feel valued, included and trusted, and by working collaboratively to achieve goals. The Councillor should be able to recognise when to delegate, provide support or empower others to take responsibility and understand and act on their role in building and shaping key partnerships at local, regional and national levels.

(iii). **Communication skills** – listening carefully to people and providing regular feedback and ensuring that expectations are managed. The Councillor should also try to inform and communicate with people using all available media e.g. internet, newsletters and email etc. Councillors should also be supported to be able to speak confidently in public settings e.g. council and community meetings and dealing with the media.

(iv). **Political understanding** – acting ethically, consistently and with integrity when making decisions, campaigning or canvassing. The Councillor should also be able to look at ways to promote democracy and increase public engagement and to work across Political boundaries when required, without compromising political values.

(v). **Scrutiny and challenge** – acting as a critical friend by identifying suitable areas for scrutiny, providing constructive feedback and ensuring that residents and communities are involved in the scrutiny process. Members should be supported to be able to understand and

analyse complex information, ask challenging but constructive questions and present clear concise arguments that are easily understood.

(vi). **Regulating and monitoring** – understanding and acting on members' judicial role in meeting legal responsibilities such as duty of care and corporate parenting. Members should be able to use evidence to evaluate arguments and make independent, impartial judgements. Members should also receive support to monitor their own and others' performance and look for opportunities to learn.

Positive and Negative Indicators

5. Each of the skill set definitions describe what is expected of councillors if they are to be effective and influential in their role.

6. Positive (desirable) behaviours and Negative (undesirable) behaviours are included for each of the skill sets. It is not expected that any member could demonstrate excellent levels of positive behaviour all of the time, and never demonstrate any Negative behaviour, but excellent councillors generally demonstrate far more Positive than Negative characteristics.

7. These behaviours are described as positive and negative indicators because they provide an indication of the types of behaviour that councillors associate with excellent and poor performance.

Local Leadership

Positive	Negative
Engages with community, canvasses opinion and looks for new ways of representing people	Doesn't engage with their community, waits to be approached and is difficult to contact
Keeps up-to-date with local concerns by drawing information from diverse sources, including hard to reach groups	Maintains a low public profile, not easily recognised in their community
Encourages trust and respect by being approachable, empathising and finding new ways to engage with others	Treats groups or people unequally, fails to build integration or cohesion
Creates partnerships with different sections and groups in the community and ensures their involvement in decision-making	Has a poor understanding of local concerns and how those might be addressed.
Mediates fairly and constructively between people and groups with conflicting needs	Concentrates on council processes rather than people
Works with others to develop and champion a shared local vision	Is unrealistic about what they can achieve and fails to deliver on promises

Partnership Working

Positive	Negative
Works proactively to build good relationships with colleagues, officers, community groups and other organisations	Prefers to exert control, impose solutions or criticise and using status rather than through persuasion, involving others and constructive feedback
Emphasis on achieving shared goals by maintaining focus and mobilising others	Fails to recognise or make use of others' skills and ideas
Knows when to delegate, provide support or empower others to take responsibility	Typically avoids working with people with different views or political values
Makes people from all backgrounds feel valued, trusted and included (e.g. says 'thank you')	Prefers to act alone and fails to engage or network with others.
Understands and acts on their role in building and shaping key partnerships at local, regional and national levels	Often uses divisive tactics to upset relationships within their group, or council policies and decisions
Understands how and when to assert authority to resolve conflict or deadlock effectively	Defensive when criticised, blames others and doesn't admit to being wrong

Communication Skills

Positive	Negative
Provides regular feedback to people, making sure they are kept informed and manages expectations	Slow to respond to others; tends to communicate only when necessary
Regularly informs and communicates with their community using all available media (eg, internet newsletters and email)	Doesn't listen when people are speaking and uses inappropriate or insensitive language
Listens to others, checks for understanding and adapts their own communication style as required	Communicates in a dogmatic and inflexible way
Creates opportunities to communicate with different sectors, including vulnerable and hard to reach groups	Unwilling to deliver unpopular messages, uses information dishonestly to discredit others.
Speaks confidently in public settings (e.g. in council and community meetings, and the media)	Tends not to participate in meetings and lacks confidence when speaking in public

Communicates clearly in spoken and written forms (e.g. uses appropriate language and avoids jargon or 'council speak')	Presents confused arguments using poor language and style

Political understanding

Positive	Negative
Demonstrates a consistency in views and values through their decisions and actions	Lacks integrity, has inconsistent political values and tends to say what others want to hear
Helps to develop cohesion within and between different groups and also between different groups and the council	Puts personal motives first or changes beliefs to match those in power
Clearly communicates political values through canvassing and campaigning	Has poor knowledge of group manifesto, values and objectives
Actively develops their own political intelligence (e.g. understanding local and national political landscapes)	Fails to support political colleagues in public.
Looks for ways to promote democracy and increase public engagement	Doesn't translate group values into ways of helping the community
Is able to put party politics aside and work across political boundaries when required, without compromising political values	Lacks a clear political vision of what they would like to achieve

Scrutiny and Challenge

Positive	Negative
Identifies areas suitable for scrutiny and ensures that citizens and communities are involved in the scrutiny process and ensure topics align with key council and mayoral objectives	Doesn't prepare well or check facts and draws biased conclusions
Quickly understands and analyses complex information	Too reliant on officers, tends to back down when challenged
Presents concise arguments that are meaningful and easily understood	Fails to see scrutiny as part of their role
Understands the scrutiny process, asks for explanations and checks that recommendations have been implemented	Too focused on detail, doesn't distinguish between good, poor and irrelevant information

Objective and rigorous when challenging process, decisions and people	Uses scrutiny resources inappropriately (eg, on issues over which they have no influence or for political gain)
Asks challenging but constructive questions	Overly aggressive: prefers political 'blood sports' to collaboration and uses scrutiny for political gain

Regulating and monitoring

Positive	Negative
Understands and acts on their judicial role in meeting legal responsibilities (e.g. duty of care, corporate parenting)	Doesn't declare personal interests, makes decisions for personal gain
Uses evidence to evaluate arguments and make independent, impartial judgements	Fails to check facts or consider all sides and makes subjective or uninformed judgements
Chairs meetings effectively, follows protocol to make sure all views are explored and keeps process on track	Leaves monitoring and checks on progress to others
Follows legal process, balances public needs and local policy	Makes decisions without taking advice, considering regulations or taking account of wider issues
Monitors others' performance and intervenes when necessary to ensure progress	Doesn't Understand or abide by the councillor's code of conduct
Is committed to self-development, seeks feedback and looks for opportunities to learn	Misses deadlines, leaves business unfinished and lacks balance between council and other commitments

Learning Resources for delivering the Framework

8. In delivering the Framework the following learning resources would be utilised:-

- Member inductions;
- Members' Handbook;
- Workshops/seminars /briefings;
- Self-review / Assessment – LGA workbooks;
- Feedback - review mechanism;
- Mentoring/ Coaching ; (political groups/ LGA CfPS)
- Personal Development Plans
- E-learning materials
- Members Section - Council intranet
- Leadership academy

HOW WILL THE FRAMEWORK BE DELIVERED?

9. An annual Member Development Programme is produced to meet member development needs and shows how the events/briefings/seminars are aligned with this skills framework (Appendix1). This programme will be submitted to the Constitution and Member Development Committee on an annual basis.

10. Currently, a variety of approaches is taken to meeting Members' collective and individual development needs.

11. These include:Role specific skills and knowledge are delivered through a variety of methods. For example, training sessions are offered to Committee Chairs in chairing skills whilst Senior/Executive Members are offered the opportunity to attend LGA Leadership Academy events (subject to certain criteria).

Training on corporate initiatives and strategies

12. Keeping Members informed and up to date is one of the essential outcomes for member development. A programme of events/seminars is organised throughout the year to brief and engage Members on key issues. The subject of each seminar is determined either by Member request, by a service or as a result of legislative changes.

Member Induction

13. All newly elected will be offered an Induction Programme which will cover the basic areas of knowledge necessary for newly elected Councillors. However, re-elected Members are also welcome to attend should they require a refresher or be willing to share their knowledge and experience with their new colleagues. The Programme will provide information on

> ❖ How the Council works (i.e. governance);
> ❖ The Mayor's Priorities/ Strategic Plan
> ❖ The legal requirements, roles and responsibilities of Members;
> ❖ Protocols and requirements in respect of ethics and probity;
> ❖ An introduction to the services provided by the Council

Generic skills development

14. Generic skills development and awareness training and drop in sessions are offered to Members on subjects such as IT and information systems throughout the year. IT skills are particularly important in order to ensure that Members are able to play a full role in the Council. Officers will look for themes from Personal Development conversations to help identify where generic skills training may be useful.

Required Development

15. The Council's protocol is that Members will be required to undertake training or attend briefings in respect of certain roles and in order to serve on certain Committees. This is aimed at protecting members and the Council from prospective

challenge to legislative decision making. This training programme is organised on an annual basis, following the AGM, when committee membership is confirmed. Ad hoc one-to-one training will be provided for any subsequent membership changes to committees.

16. These include Planning & Development Committee, Licensing Committee and Sub-Committees, Standards Committee and Standards Hearings Sub-Committee, Staff Appeals Committee, Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee, Teesside Pension Fund Committee, Teesside Pension Board and Family Placement Panel. This training should be undertaken on an annual basis.

17. Whilst training may be devised for specifically for Committee Members, these events are open to all Members to attend, which will also aid groups should they wish to appoint a substitute to attend a Committee in the case of absence of one of their Members.

18. Newly elected Chairs and Vice-Chairs will also be required to attend Chairs' training sessions following the Council AGM (or following their appointment if not appointed at the AGM)

Standards - Code of Conduct

19. All Members are required to undertake training in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Personal Development

20. It is up to each individual Councillor to take responsibility for their own individual development. Where skills or knowledge gaps are identified through a Personal Development conversation, officers can advise on possible training activities which could meet the development need.

21. Members are encouraged to consider different approaches to their development, including: requesting a one to one with an appropriate officer, undertaking site visits, discussing a matter with a more experienced Member, carrying out some personal research or attending an external event.

22. Where possible, the Council will seek to offer training and development opportunities with other local authorities and partner organisations and provide joint training activities where appropriate.

23. Each political group may also provide opportunities for training within their own group.

In Year Ad Hoc Opportunities

24. The Member Development Programme provides a range of different opportunities for attendance at a range of learning events. These will include conferences, seminars, training courses, briefings, workshops and forums.

25. Members will be invited by Democratic Services or the Service Area planning the event, to attend internal events and briefing sessions that either appear in the Programme or are added to the Programme throughout the year.

26. Any Member can also request other events/ topics to be included in the Programme. Whenever there is sufficient interest from Members in respect of a topic, or where the topic is considered by the Constitution and Members' Development Committee to be of sufficient importance, all efforts will be made to accommodate these requests.

27. There will also be some opportunities to attend external events subject to certain criteria, details of which are dealt with at page 12/13 (below).

28. All Members will be given the opportunity to undertake a self-assessment and / or a Personal Development Plan. This will involve Members completing a self-assessment questionnaire followed by a one-to-one session with the Head of Democratic Services, a HR representative or a Group Leader.

29. As part of the Skills Framework we will work with senior Members and Chairs to consider ways of providing constructive feedback on the performance of their roles.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SENIOR MEMBERS

30. Senior Elected Members have a vital role in establishing and maintaining the strategic direction of the Council. They support the Council, by acting as Community Leaders, to achieve our corporate priorities and as such a more detailed level of opportunities and a greater level of understanding of national and regional issues may be required.

31. Senior Members' include Executive Members, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees and Scrutiny Panels)

32. Senior Members need to be self-aware, confident, self-managed, proactive, aware of their impact on others and capable of forming healthy and productive relationships and partnerships.

Required Development

33. All Executive Members are **required** to commit to undertaking the following;

- An Induction and overview of their service area and their respective responsibilities (portfolio/delegations)
- A Personal Development Plan
- Attendance at a Chairing Skills Course;
- Attendance at an appropriate leadership course
- Making themselves aware of:
  - Any audit/legislative requirements for their area of responsibility;
  - Performance and risk associated with their portfolio
  - Decision making processes of the Council (Including Scrutiny and Officer Delegated Decision making);
- Media / Social media skills

34. Other **Senior Members** are **required** to attend:

- A Chairing Skills Course;
- Any audit/legislative requirements tailored to need/relevance to role

35. Chairs and Vice-Chairs are required to attend Chairs' training sessions following the Council AGM (or on appointment as a Chair, if not appointed at the AGM).

36. These training sessions will cover:

- Effective chairing skills;
- An overview of their role and scope of their respective responsibilities;
- Decision making processes of the Council (both Member and Officer);
- Any audit/legislative requirements tailored to need/relevance; and
- Media skills

Leadership Academy

37. Senior Members will be given the opportunity to apply to attend the Local Government Association's (LGA) Leadership academy or themed events aimed at supporting senior elected leaders and senior officers (see page 12/13 for guidance on external event criteria). The LGA have a wide ranging programme of events which will enable members to share their concerns and challenges; learn from one another; work together on addressing the big issues they face; and explore and test new ways of working and leading across their organisations, partnerships and communities to deliver enhanced public value in these challenging times.

38. The Programme is designed for Councillors in leadership positions such as:

- Mayor/ Deputy Mayor
- Executive
- Group leaders
- Scrutiny/Committee Chairs/Vice Chairs

39. In order to attend leadership academy then a Personal Development Plan must have been undertaken or it must be evidenced that this meets the needs of a role specific performance indicator.

THE EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

40. The Programme is a key part of the Council's commitment to Member Development and training and is a shared responsibility between the Council and individual Members.

41. In order to aid the successful delivery of the Programme, it is important that Councillors seek to fulfil their responsibilities through the following:

I. **Induction Programme**
All newly elected Members to engage in the Council's Induction programme.

II. **Attending required training or development events**

Members who wish to sit on certain committees (such as Planning and Regulatory Committees) must have undertaken the relevant training beforehand to ensure that they are compliant with the legislation.

III. **Standards of Behaviour**

All Members will be expected to undertake a training module covering:
- ❖ Members' Code of Conduct;
- ❖ Member/Officer protocols;
- ❖ Pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests;
- ❖ Gifts and hospitality.

IV. **Personal Development Plans** - Members will have the opportunity to complete a Personal Development Plan which will enable Democratic Services to identify events or training that may meet the individual's needs and / or the role of the Member, and the broader requirements of the Council.

Records

42. Democratic Services keep a record of all the learning and development activities attended by each Member. These records will be accessible through the Egenda system. In order to aid substitutions, groups may also request a list of trained substitutes from Democratic Services.

Evaluation

43. Members are required to complete training evaluation forms at the end of any development / training event attended. This should be done as honestly and as constructively as possible, so that any necessary changes can be made accordingly to future events / programmes. Members might wish to keep a copy of these with their Personal Development Plans**.**

Sharing Learning Experiences

44. When Members attend external training and development events, in some cases, Members may be asked to provide a briefing session to other Members in order to share any information/ learning acquired.

Attendance at External Events

45. Attendance at external training and development events and conferences can assist the work and development both of individual Councillors, and of the Council, by bringing new knowledge and ideas into the Authority.

46. However, in order to ensure that attendance at such training events represents the best use of Council resources, it is necessary to have the following criteria for determining attendance:

- ❖ The event directly relates to the priorities and work of the Council, and to the role of the Member requesting to attend, OR

- ❖ The event directly addresses new legislation, new "best practice" requirements, or other innovation and **relates to the role of the Member** OR

- ❖ The event meets the personal development needs of the individual Member.

47. Other factors will also be taken into account, including 'best value' (e.g. consideration of the delegate fee, travel and accommodation costs, location and duration of the event); the budget available; and the provider.

48. Where Council funding is required to attend an event, authorisation must be sought from the Head of Democratic Services or in their absence, the Director of Legal and Governance Services. Failure to seek authorisation may result in costs not being refunded.

49. Members wishing to attend such events should therefore contact the **Head of Democratic Services**, **before** booking any event. Members should give as much notice as possible of events that they wish to attend, in order to ensure any early bird booking/travel discounts can be achieved. Booking and travel arrangements should be administered through Democratic Services.

50. Individual Political Groups may have their own protocol with regards to authorising the attendance at external events.