

Draft – Councillors’ Learning and Development Policy

Rushcliffe Borough Council

2026 - 2029

1. Introduction

Every member of Rushcliffe Borough Council strives to serve the communities they represent, and the Borough as a whole, to the best of their ability.

This Policy aims to help to develop Councillors so that they will have the necessary knowledge, skills and attributes to significantly improve the Council’s decision making, the quality of its services and the work Councillors do to benefit their communities. Councillors need a whole range of skills in order to embrace the increasing complexity of their individual roles. Every Councillor has the right to access learning activities that will provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to effectively perform their duties as elected representatives.

The Councillors’ Learning and Development Policy recognises the need for different forms of development, both in content and method of delivery. It addresses developmental needs in skills and knowledge, having regard to the context of local government in a rapidly changing society.

2. Why have a Policy?

The development of Councillors is an essential investment by Rushcliffe Borough Council in its own future. The Member Development Group recognises that Councillors have different skills and expertise gained through employment and life. The Group is keen to enable Councillors to access as many development opportunities as possible to make them effective in their ever-changing role as a Councillor. Councillor development can have a significant impact on the performance of the organisation. Well-equipped Councillors are better placed to make the decisions necessary to make the Borough a great place to live, work and play, and can deal with the challenges and changes faced by the organisation.

3. Key Principles

- Councillors will be offered opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and expertise they need to perform their roles effectively
- Development will be available to all Councillors irrespective of political allegiance
- Councillors will be encouraged to take responsibility for, and actively seek opportunities for, their own learning and development

- Ensure a consistent approach to Councillor development
- Creation of a learning culture for Councillors at Rushcliffe Borough Council that regards continuous Councillor development as vital to its success
- Councillors to have ownership of the development programme via the Member Development Group
- In line with the Councillor Training Principles
- Consistent with Equal Opportunity policies.

4. Implementation

This Policy will be implemented:

- By the Member Development Group with support from the Democratic Services team (following approval by Full Council)
- With the assistance of Group Leaders who will actively encourage their members to participate in development activities and give feedback on courses attended
- By monitoring on a regular basis to ensure the take up and effectiveness of development activity.

The following learning and development principles have been agreed by Councillors (and are expanded upon in Appendix One to this document):

- Some training is mandatory meaning that it is necessary to complete this training before taking up a seat on the Planning Committee, Licensing Committee, Standards Committee, Interviewing Committee, and Employment Appeals Committee – this includes as a substitute
- Some training is considered mandatory to keep you and the Council safe and up to date in terms of legislation, budgetary position and current good practice
- Some training is considered mandatory depending upon the role you have within the Council; examples include scrutiny or risk management
- All mandatory training should be completed within 12 months of becoming a Councillor
- Dispensations for mandatory training undertaken for other employers will be given on production of evidence such as a current certificate or written confirmation from another employer
- The Council also provides access to training it considers to be desirable to support Councillors being as effective as possible
- A training record will be held by the Democratic Services Team for every Councillor during their term of office.

The learning and development principles document also outlines minimum numbers which must be met to avoid the cancellation of training events.

The programme will incorporate the following:

- Induction for new Councillors and refresher training for re-elected Councillors following a Borough Council Election to ensure that all Councillors have the necessary skills to be an effective Councillor including information about how the Council works and how decisions are made

- An annual training programme incorporating:
 - Core competencies – skills that all Councillors will benefit from including personal safety, caseload management and public speaking
 - Specific skills – building on the core competencies to pick up on a specific skills set for certain roles including media training for Cabinet members, chairing skills and questioning for scrutiny members
 - Mandatory training necessary to carry out specific roles on regulatory committees such as Planning, Licensing, Interviewing and Employment Appeals reflecting the policy and statutory requirements which directly affect Councillors
- A suite of e-learning packages designed to offer a range of information and skills development that can be undertaken by Councillors at a time and in place that suits their busy lives.
- Access to externally provided training courses and briefing sessions held by East Midlands Councils, the Local Government Association or private individuals to increase Councillor skills and understanding.

Accessing training:

This Policy encourages use of a wide range of methods to meet learning and development needs for individuals and groups. When choosing learning and development methods, the focus will be on the outcomes in terms of improved performance. Training will be delivered:

- With sessions at different times of the day to meet demand where possible
- Using different methods, including presentations, interactive sessions, briefing sessions, workshops and electronic learning to meet a range of different learning styles
- A training request form can be found on the Councillors' Portal or Councillors can contact Democratic Services directly.

Supporting Councillor Development:

The Council is a member of East Midlands Councils, which shares ideas and training opportunities.

Evaluation of training opportunities:

A variety of different evaluation methods are used to measure the effectiveness of the Councillors' Learning and Development Programme. These include:

- Sample development events or briefings are assessed by using a simple SurveyMonkey evaluation form
- Councillors who attend externally provided courses will be encouraged to provide feedback to the Democratic Services Team to ensure value for money is obtained
- Member Development Group reviews training delivered including Councillors evaluation comments each time it meets

5. Methods of Delivery

These will include:

- Internal training courses, briefings and workshops
- Training courses held in-house but delivered by external providers
- Shared training courses with other authorities
- Written learning materials available via the Councillors' Portal
- E-learning packages available via the Councillors' Portal
- Occasional one-to-one training delivered by officers to meet a specific need.

6. Accessibility

It is recognised and understood that Councillors come from a variety of backgrounds, with different skills, experiences, knowledge and expertise in a wide range of subject areas, and that each Councillor may have different learning and development needs and different learning styles.

The objective is that all learning and development opportunities should be open to all Councillors. No Councillor should be disadvantaged by their previous work, life or learning experience in the way learning and development opportunities are offered and accessed. The Democratic Services Team will respond positively to reasonable requests from Councillors regarding how development opportunities can be made more accessible.

7. Member Development Group – Role and Remit

The Member Development Group is made up of representatives from the main political groups. Its role is to:

- Create an environment that encourages self-development and continuous learning
- Identify, deliver and evaluate learning and development opportunities for all Councillors
- Create an effective Councillor induction programme for delivery following a Borough Council Election
- Overseeing changes to the way Councillors work and deliver their role
- Evaluating and making changes to the Councillors' Community Grant Scheme as required.

8. Responsibilities

Democratic Services Team

- Develop a comprehensive Induction programme for new Councillors following a Borough Council Election
- Develop and resource an annual training programme for all Councillors

- Provide e-learning modules for Councillors to extend the variety of training opportunities available to them
- Promote training activities being run by other providers such as East Midlands Councils or the Local Government Association
- Evaluate the impact and outcomes of all learning activities and report these to the Member Development Group
- Actively promote learning and development events.

Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Councillor Development

- Actively promote learning and development events provided by the Council and external providers.

Member Development Group

- Contribute to the development of a comprehensive Induction programme for new Councillors following a Borough Council Election
- Agree an annual training programme for all Councillors
- Encourage participation in learning activities for all Councillors
- Note the training evaluation reports presented by the Democratic Services Team and take action if required.

All Councillors

- Participate in training opportunities, in person or electronically, to widen their experience and knowledge
- Provide feedback on the effectiveness and benefit of training undertaken to the Democratic Services Team
- Seek and identify training opportunities themselves and forward any such information to the Democratic Services Team
- Share what they have learnt with other Councillors especially if this learning has been access externally.

9. Communications

Successful communication is an important element of Councillor development. A weekly Councillors' Connections e-newsletter is used to highlight and remind Councillors about forthcoming training events.

Additionally, Group Leaders are asked on a regular basis to encourage their members to attend particular events.

There is a designated page on the Councillors' Portal containing information about member development.

10. Resources and Support

This Policy will be delivered by the Democratic Services team with the input of professional officers where appropriate. A dedicated budget is available for Councillor development covering all internal and external training events, materials and conferences.

11. How is the Policy Monitored?

The Member Development Group will monitor the progress of the work at its meetings. The feedback from the programme of Councillor development activities and how Councillors are developing as a result will be assessed. This will be used to make continuous improvements to the programme and ensure that Councillors are assisting the Borough in achieving its corporate priorities.

Following concerns about participation levels in training (and in particular take-up of mandatory training opportunities), a report will be submitted annually to Standards Committee outlining participation rates.

If necessary, the Chair of Standards Committee will write to individuals with mandatory training remaining undone more than 12 months after becoming a Councillor. Should this situation persist, then the Chair of Standards Committee reserves the right to identify individual Councillors not meeting the required standard.

Appendix One – Councillor Learning and Development Principles

Each year the Council creates a Training Programme, in conjunction with the Member Development Group.

The Training Programme consists of courses offered face-to-face, delivered by both internal and external speakers as appropriate, and via the Council's E-Learning platform. The provision of E-learning training is to provide greater flexibility for Councillors to undertake training in their own environment without the need to come into RBC offices.

In both cases, some courses are considered mandatory for all Councillors to understand their legal, legislative and community leadership responsibilities. Some courses are considered mandatory for certain groups, such as those on particular committees or with specific responsibilities. Others are desirable for the Councillors to choose whether or not the training would be helpful to them in undertaking their role as a Councillor.

The following Learning and Development principles sit behind the Training Programme:

- The Democratic Services Team will maintain a Training Record for each Councillor which is available to the Councillor at any point during their Term of Office
- Councillors must make every effort to attend face-to-face essential sessions such as Planning Committee training or the annual budget workshops when they are provided
- Councillors in specific positions of responsibility, or on certain committees, must make every effort to attend face-to-face training essential to their role, such as Licensing Committee training when it is provided (ideally prior to first meeting); and likewise encourage all members of the respective committee to attend.
- All essential training should be completed within 12 months (subject to exceptional circumstances such as illness). Where it has not been possible to complete training in this time, Councillors should seek advice from the Democratic Services Team to arrange completion
- Group Leaders will have access to records of attendance of their Group Councillors' attendance and will encourage attendance, particularly for essential training
- Continued failure to undertake essential training courses could be referred as a Standards issue to the Council's Monitoring Officer given the Councillors role 'to promote and support high standards of conduct in accordance with the principles within the Councillors' Code of Conduct
- Dispensations can be awarded for training undertaken for other organisations (such as a workplace or other community leadership role) by providing the Democratic Services Team with written evidence such as a certificate or email from another employer
- As well as the publication of an annual Training Programme booklet, the Democratic Services Team will publicise training events in the Councillors' Connections publication

- With regard to externally delivered face-to-face courses, if ten people are not signed up for the course eight weeks in advance then the course will be cancelled
- With regard to internally delivered face-to-face courses, if six people are not signed up for the course two weeks in advance then the course will be cancelled.

Mandatory Training – Councillors are not permitted to sit on these committees without the relevant training or briefing

- Planning Committee
- Licensing Committee
- Standards Committee
- Employment Appeals Committee
- Interviewing Committee

Mandatory Training – designed to keep you and the council safe and up to date with key budget, and legislative information and good practice.

- Planning for Ward Councillors – All (face to face)
- Understanding Scrutiny/Scrutiny Skills – All (face to face)
- Understanding Local Government Finance – All (face to face)
- Understanding your responsibilities GDPR and Cyber Crime – All (face to face)
- Understanding and making the most of Motions – All (face to face)
- Annual Budget Session – All (face to face)
- Treasury Management – All (face to face)
- Risk Management – All (face to face)
- Understanding the role of the officer and getting the best out of relationships with officers – All (face to face)
- Domestic Violence Awareness – All (face to face)
- Your role as a Councillor – All (e-learning)
- Equality and Diversity – All (e-learning)
- Disability and Discrimination – All (e-learning)
- Safeguarding Adults – All (e-learning)
- Safeguarding Children – All (e-learning)
- Section 17: Crime and Disorder – All (e-learning)

Desirable Training – to support you to be as effective as possible

- Chairing Skills (face to face)
- Getting tough (face to face)
- Emergency Planning (face to face)
- Cyber security (face to face)
- Dementia Awareness (face to face)
- Dyslexia, Autism and Sensory Issues (face to face)
- Retrospective Planning Applications (face to face)
- Personal safety and dealing with online abuse and intimidation (face to face/online)

- Understanding domestic violence and the Council's role in supporting victims (face to face)
- Effective Communication – Public Speaking (face to face)
- Debating skills for Councillors (face to face/online)
- Armed Forces Community Covenant (e-learning)
- Chairing Meetings (e-learning)
- Community Leadership (e-learning)
- Managing Information Effectively (e-learning)
- Public Speaking (e-learning)
- Working with the Media (e-learning)
- Hate Crime – All (e-learning)
- GDPR 1, 2 and 3 – All (e-learning)
- Cyber-crime, phishing, smishing and vishing – All (e-learning)
- Information Classification – All (e-learning)
- Display Screen Equipment – All (e-learning)
- Prevent – All (e-learning)