

Title of Report:	Elected Member Development Chartered Steering Group
Committee Report Submitted To:	Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	27 October 2026
For Decision or For Information	For Information
To be discussed In Committee	No

Linkage to Council Plan (2026-31)	
Strategic Theme	Governance, Quality & Continuous Improvement
Outcome	Governance arrangements that ensure compliance, transparency, and effective decision-making
Lead Officer	Senior Democratic Services Officer

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	n/a – ongoing

Budgetary Considerations			
Cost of Proposal		NIL	
Included in Current Year Estimates		Yes	
Capital/Revenue		N/A	
Code		N/A	
Staffing Costs			
Legal Considerations			
Input of Legal Services Required		NO	
Legal Opinion Obtained		NO	
Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the Elected Member Development Chartered Steering Group.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Council achieved Chartered Status in January 2023. As this accreditation lasts for three years, a reassessment is due. It is anticipated that this will be scheduled in Quarter 1 of 2027.
- 2.2 In preparation for the reassessment, a Training Needs Analysis for Elected Members was issued in August 2026, following on from the previous TNA in January 2024 to assess members' confidence across key competency areas, identify training priorities, and inform the future Member Development Programme. The 2024 survey received 29 responses, while the 2026 survey received 17 responses.

3.0 Training Needs Analysis Report

- 3.1 A report is provided at Appendix 1 that summarises the key findings from the January 2024 and August 2026 Elected Member Training Needs Analyses. Having two surveys allows for analysis of how Members skills and needs have adapted across the mandate.
- 3.2 In summary, the comparison demonstrates a positive progression in member confidence and capability since the 2024 survey. While foundational training remains important, the focus has shifted towards more specialised development needs, in areas such as governance, leadership, planning and artificial intelligence (AI).
- 3.3 These findings will inform the training schedule for the remainder of the 2026/27 term to ensure that learning opportunities are aligned with members' current responsibilities and identified development needs.
- 3.4 The findings will also be used in the development of the Elected Member Development programme for the incoming mandate, with a particular focus on support that can be provided to newly elected Members to allow them to perform their role in an informed and confident manner.

4.0 Assessment Report

- 4.1 Following the audit of Democratic Services undertaken by CavanaghKelly, and reported to Council in March 2024, one Priority 3 Recommendation arose: "It is recommended that the Assessment Report be a standing agenda item for EMDSG and progress on implementation

of each of the recommendations be reported under this item.” The Assessment Report is provided at Appendix 2. The recommendations are addressed below:

4.2 Annual work programme of priorities

Members have been surveyed to identify their training needs for 2026-27. Skillgate training modules will be allocated to Elected Members based on their responses to the Training Needs Analysis. Further training will be scheduled as required.

4.3 Personal Development Planning

Members are asked to advise Democratic Services of any training that they have undertaken that can be added to their training record.

4.4 E-learning

As of June 2026, all Elected Members have been enrolled in Council's MetaCompliance cyber awareness training programme, with training modules to be issued on a weekly basis. Members are asked to complete these and the cyber security training exercises that are assigned to them.

4.5 As of September 2026, the Skillgate Module 'Code of Conduct- NILGA' has been pinned to Elected Members Skillgate Pinboard. All Elected Members are asked to complete this module as soon as possible as part of the mandatory annual training programme. At the time of drafting this report, no Members had completed this training module.

4.6 Members are asked to complete all assigned training on Skillgate to ensure a high compliance rate. Currently, the compliance rate for the assigned modules is extremely low (see Appendix 3). Members should be aware that low engagement with training and development could affect Council's upcoming Chartered status reassessment and are therefore asked to prioritise completion of these modules. Members are advised to please contact ICT if they are having difficulties accessing Skillgate to complete training modules.

4.7 Induction programme

As part of the August 2026 Training Needs Analysis, Councillors were asked to reflect on their induction to their role as a Councillor and suggest ideas for support or training that they would have found useful. The results from this survey will be used to inform the development of the 2027 induction programme.

4.8 Mentoring programme

As part of the August 2026 Training Needs Analysis, Councillors were surveyed on their experiences of mentoring in Council. This feedback will be used to inform the development of a structured mentoring support programme in Council.

4.9 Leadership Development

As part of the August 2026 Training Needs Analysis, Councillors were surveyed on their experience of Leadership Development. Their responses will be used to inform the development of this training element.

5.0 **Training Update**

In April 2024, the following programme of training was agreed by Members:

5.1 **Table – Elected Member Development Training Schedule**

April 2024-March 2025 – Training Course	Skill Category
• Leading Through Change • Elected Member Role in Equality and Diversity • Communication Skills • Dignity and Respect • Setting The Rates • Information Security and Confidentiality • Time Management	Local Leadership Partnership Working Communication Skills Political Understanding Scrutiny & Challenge Regulatory & Monitoring Personal Resilience
April 2025-March 2026 – Training Course	Skill Category
• Member/Officer Roles • Handling The Media Interview • Social Media and the Code of Conduct • Managing Challenging Behaviours • Planning Policy • Team Building	Partnership Working Communication Skills Communication Skills Political Understanding Regulating and Monitoring Personal Resilience
April 2026-March 2027 – Training Course	Skill Category
• Cultural Competency • Presentation Skills • Developing Effective Working Relationships • Safeguarding Training for Vulnerable Adults and Children • Health and Safety • Personal Resilience	Partnership Working Communication Skills Political Understanding Regulatory and Monitoring Regulatory and Monitoring Personal Resilience

5.2 **Mandatory Annual Training Programme**

Elected Members are required annually to undertake Mandatory Training:

- Code of Conduct Training – see paragraph 3.4 above.
- Planning Committee Training – see paragraph 5.4 below.
- Audit Committee Training - recommended requirement prior to sitting on Audit Committee
- Fraud Awareness - question that is asked each year by Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) as part of the Annual Financial Audit
- Scrutiny and Challenge Training – arose as part of the [Extraordinary Audit](#)

- 5.3** A Planning Committee Training session delivered by a representative of Cleaver Fulton Rankin has been scheduled for Wednesday 21 October 2026. This has been offered as a fully remote evening session and open to all Elected Members to facilitate attendance and as a development opportunity for Elected Members to learn more about the duties of Planning Committee Members.
- 5.4** Further Mandatory Training will be scheduled over the coming months with invitations to be issued to all Councillors.

6.0 Training Opportunities

- 6.1** Members are advised that any upcoming training opportunities will be listed on the Members Portal: [Upcoming Training Opportunities | Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council](#)
- 6.2** Further to the feedback from the Training Needs Analysis requesting more content on AI, Members are encouraged to attend the ‘Smarter decisions through data insights’ training session provided by APSE at Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey on 20 October 2026.
- 6.3** The Interim Heads of Planning are currently developing a programme of “Toolbox Talks” on key planning policies, to be delivered as lunchtime sessions over the coming months. Further information on this will be circulated to all Members.

7.0 Elected Members Conference Attendance

- 7.1** Attached at Appendix 3 is a delegate report from the APSE Annual Seminar 2026, on Local Government on the Frontline – Meeting Challenges and Supporting Communities held in Liverpool from 16 to 17 September 2026. This was provided by Alderman Brown Stewart who attended the seminar and AGM, and provides a useful insight into the event.
- 7.2** An Elected Members Conference Attendance Policy is currently being reviewed and will be brought for Members approval at the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee meeting.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1** **It is recommended** that Members note the Elected Member Development Chartered Steering Group update and particularly the request that Skillgate modules are completed as a priority.

Comparison of Elected Member Training Needs Analysis Surveys: January 2024 and August 2026

Introduction

An Elected Member Training Needs Analysis was conducted in January 2024 and again in August 2026 to assess Members' confidence across key competency areas, identify training priorities, and inform the future Member Development Programme. The 2024 survey received 29 responses, while the 2026 survey received 17 responses.

The results indicate an overall increase in self-reported confidence levels amongst Members, alongside a shift in development priorities from foundational councillor skills towards more specialised areas such as governance, leadership, planning and artificial intelligence (AI).

Summary Comparison

Area	January 2024	August 2026	Key Finding
Number of Responses	29	17	Reduced participation in 2026.
Overall Competence Levels	Members generally assessed themselves at Levels 3 and 4 across most competencies.	Most Members assessed themselves at Levels 4 and 5 across the majority of competencies.	Increased confidence and experience evident.
Leadership Development	Leadership training identified as beneficial.	Strong demand for leadership, influencing and visionary leadership programmes.	Leadership remains a significant development priority.
Communication Skills	High interest in communication, media and presentation training.	Continued interest in communication and social media-related training.	Consistent training need.
Equality & Diversity	Strong support for equality and diversity training.	Continued interest in inclusion, diversity and cultural competency development.	Ongoing priority area.

Governance & Scrutiny	Interest in statutory roles, scrutiny and audit responsibilities.	Increased demand for governance, audit, planning and committee-related training.	Greater focus on governance responsibilities.
AI & Data Skills	Not included in survey.	Significant interest in AI, data analysis and digital literacy topics.	Major new training requirement identified.
Personal Resilience	Strong interest in wellbeing, resilience and time management.	Continued interest but lower prominence compared to governance and AI.	Remains relevant but less of a priority.
Induction Feedback	Limited qualitative feedback.	Requests for more information on council structures, contacts and departmental responsibilities.	Opportunity to strengthen future induction programmes.

Key Findings

Increased Confidence and Competence

The results suggest that Members generally feel more confident in carrying out their roles than they did in 2024. Across many competency areas, respondents in 2026 reported higher levels of confidence and were more likely to rate themselves as fully competent. This is particularly evident among Members who completed both surveys.

Continued Demand for Leadership Development

Leadership continues to be one of the strongest development themes. Members expressed interest in programmes covering:

- Effective Leadership Skills
- Influencing and Persuasion
- Visionary Leadership
- Motivational Leadership
- Developing Others

These themes featured prominently in both surveys but were more targeted in 2026.

Emerging Demand for AI and Data Literacy

One of the most significant developments since 2024 is the emergence of AI and digital skills as a training priority. Members expressed interest in:

- Everyday Uses of AI
- Understanding Data
- Data Analysis
- Recognising Data Types
- Strategic Analysis Tools

Several respondents also specifically commented on the need for AI training as part of future development programmes.

Increased Focus on Governance and Scrutiny

The 2026 findings indicate growing interest in governance-related responsibilities, including:

- Audit and Risk
- Finance and Rates
- Committee Functions
- Planning Policy
- Scrutiny Processes
- Chairing Meetings
- Standing Orders

This suggests Members are seeking more in-depth understanding of their regulatory and decision-making responsibilities.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Interest in equality and diversity training remains evident across both surveys. Areas highlighted include:

- Cultural Competency
- Equality and Diversity
- Inclusion
- Cross-Cultural Communication
- Effective Working Relationships

These continue to represent important development themes for Members.

Induction and Organisational Awareness

Feedback from the 2026 survey identified a recurring theme around understanding the structure and operation of the Council. Members indicated that future induction programmes could include:

- Greater awareness of Council departments
- Clearer officer contact information
- Understanding officer roles and responsibilities
- Council structures and governance arrangements
- Planning processes and committee functions

This suggests that additional organisational awareness sessions could enhance future induction programmes.

Preferred Learning Methods

The preferred learning methods remained largely unchanged between surveys.

Members continue to favour:

1. Group facilitated training sessions.
2. Training delivered by Council officers.
3. E-learning modules for selected topics.

Evening sessions continue to be the most popular time for training delivery, although some Members expressed preferences for morning or afternoon sessions.

Conclusion

The comparison demonstrates a positive progression in Member confidence and capability since the 2024 survey. While foundational training remains important, the focus has shifted towards more specialised development needs.

The key training priorities emerging from the 2026 survey are:

1. Artificial Intelligence and Data Literacy.
2. Leadership and Influencing Skills.
3. Governance, Audit and Scrutiny.
4. Planning and Regulatory Responsibilities.
5. Chairing Meetings and Standing Orders.
6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

7. Member/Officer Relationships.

8. Council Structures and Organisational Awareness.

These findings will inform the training schedule for the remainder of the 2026/27 term to ensure that learning opportunities are aligned with Members' current responsibilities and identified development needs. The findings will also be used in the development of the Elected Member Development programme for the incoming mandate, with a particular focus on support that can be provided to newly Elected Members to allow them to perform their role in an informed and confident manner.



Northern Ireland Charter for Councillor Development

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Assessment Date: 26th January 2023

**Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Northern Ireland Charter for Councillor Development**

Assessment Date: 26th January 2023

Contents	Page
Recommendation of the assessment team	01
Assessment	02
Continuous improvement and direction of travel	03
Preliminary indication of additional evidence required for Charter Plus	05

Recommendation of the Assessment Team

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council have been successful in meeting the standard of the Northern Ireland Councillor Development Charter and have been awarded Charter accreditation status for three years. The assessment took place on the 26th January 2023 to determine if the Council has met the Charter standard. The assessment was based on an analysis of a portfolio of evidence as well as various interviews with key personnel and elected members. The assessors' objectives were to verify the presented evidence and to identify the council's future plans for continuous improvement to councillor learning and development.

The Council has committed to a process of continuous improvement over the next three years to build on this achievement.

The evidence presented in the portfolio was drawn from a wide range of sources and was of a **high standard** and gave an impressive overall view of member Development activities across the council. The evidence within the portfolio was clearly linked to the relevant Charter standards.

The following people were seen during the assessment visit:

Interviews (in order conducted):

- Moira Quinn – Deputy Chief Executive
- Cllr Ivor Wallace - Mayor
- **Key officers:** Pauline Donaghy, Democratic and Central Services Manager, Sinéad Duggan, Civic Support, Committee and Member Services Officer and Eithne Doherty, Civic Support Officer
- **Elected Member Development Steering Group:** Ald Hillis (Chair), Ald Mark Fielding (Vice Chair) and Ald Knight McQuillan
- **Other Councillors:** Cllr Leanne Peacock, Cllr Steven Callaghan and Ald Joan Baird

The Council will be required to undertake a full re-assessment of continuing progress in three years time, July 2024.

All councils that have achieved the Charter status are eligible to apply for Charter Plus accreditation. Full details of the framework and how to apply are available on the NILGA website (www.NILGA.org) but this report contains, at pages 5-6, a preliminary indication of additional evidence that the assessors feel would need to be put into place to achieve Charter Plus status.

If the Council does sign up for Charter Plus, then it will have 12 months from the date of sign up to assessment to achieve the status. The Charter Plus application

should take place no longer than 18 months following the initial assessment. The timetable indicated above for re-assessment against the normal Charter re-assessment will no longer apply.

Assessment team

- Councillor Terry Andrews, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- Sarah Taggart, Democratic Services Manager, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- Fiona Douglas, Regional Development Manager (Lead Assessor)

Charter standards

- Commitment to councillor development and support
- Strategic approach to councillor development
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity.

Assessment

The commitment to the Charter was made originally by the Council in February 2018, supported by all political groups and was led by the Elected Member Development Steering Group (EMDSG). This commitment was refreshed and reviewed through the Elected Member Development Steering Group at its meeting on 21st January 2021 and reaffirmed by approval at the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on 26th January 2021.

All councillors interviewed as part of the assessment process spoke of how much they recognised and valued the officer support available to them. Assessors were appreciative of those same officers help in organising a well-structured and welcoming assessment day.

Initial discussions reflected on the pathway Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council have been on to get to this assessment day, demonstrating their determination in bringing member development to the fore. A period of hiatus, linked to a lack of resources and it being only part of a much busier role, was overcome when the pandemic context presented the opportunity to focus, through the Mayoral office, resource on member development. This focus has certainly paid off with an embedded culture of learning and development established and members more aware of the role and skill sets and the comprehensive learning and development offer to support them in reaching the desired level of effectiveness. These were the key strengths that the assessment team determined:

Clear commitment to councillor development and support

- Political and Senior Management discussions referenced cross-party commitment, participation and engagement throughout the process. The Member learning and development strategy and structures are clearly linked to the Council Corporate Plan. The key role that elected members have in determining what they need to be effective in the role was very evident. There was also an understanding amongst senior political and managerial leadership that the training needs analysis is central to this as well as a requirement to be aware of the ever-changing environment and being able to adapt and coordinate at short notice.
- Senior representatives are very clear in terms of the requirement to ensure that Charter commitment is embedded through the corporate plan and that the necessary officer and resource commitment is in place. The importance of ensuring that an understanding of new challenges and skill sets required to meet these challenges was also highlighted as well as clarity of what is not the role of council.

- Engagement with the political and managerial leadership described the Elected Member Development Steering as a sub-group of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee with full ongoing engagement from the senior management team. The perception and experience is very much that the council has all things in place for the development of members and clear understanding of the EMDWG's role in this. Further demonstrated through the connection to the senior management team with a clear link between the EMDSG and SMT as well as the EMDSG's connection to the wider body of councillor.
- A robust approach and formal structures are in place to identify and prioritise learning and development need, through an individual training needs analysis, supplemented by other service area groups, regional engagement as part of NILGA Network, as well as through staff news. The role of relationships was considered key in the planning and development of the training approach.
- All learning and development opportunities, as evidenced through the various channels, are made available to all 40 members and are met using a variety of approaches, reflective of their different needs. Such need includes a facility for doing it in your own time and at your own convenience.
- The approach is also responsive and reactive to emerging needs, with a recent need for specified training on fraud awareness, which officers were able to source and implement.
- There are adequate financial resources in terms of budget and a highly dedicated officer team that make it all happen with wide recognition and appreciation all the work that goes into this.
- Senior management are acutely aware of the pressures on elected members and recognise they are also people with jobs and families. The nature of the Councillor Development Charter is considered a great enabler for councillors to be more effective in their role, while at the same time being mindful of their different commitments and time pressures. Charter is viewed as a framework that allows for flexibility which ensures maximum participation. Charter is utilised as an effective tool for greater understanding of what the members need and what will help them be more effective in the role.

A Strategic Approach to Councillor Development

- The Council has a member led Member Development Strategy and supporting plans and programmes which have been reviewed.

- The council has a member led and evidenced based learning and Development Programme 2022-23, that was approved in December 2022.
- The councillor learning and development strategy is linked to the corporate plan. The Corporate Strategy reflects through the collective leadership members' target, which members were involved in revising. Council set itself an 85% engagement target and the importance of linking members needs to what the council is trying to achieve is clearly understood. A review was undertaken of all Elected Member Development supporting documents in 2021.
- The approach is flexible with a balanced mix of corporate and one to one, where needed. In particular, completion of the ILM Level 7 Leadership was fully encouraged with participants given ample opportunity to share this learning both internally and externally.
- Communication across council departments is well developed and allows for avoidance of duplication and scope to tap into other budgets. There is an appreciation of the need for creativity as their budget is quite small.
- A three-day comprehensive induction programme has been developed for the new in take of councillors after the May 2023 election.
- A clear understanding of the role of the Councillor Development Charter and its importance in supporting councillors with the issues they face came across strongly. The Charter framework, it is understood, provides the strength, sense of purpose and impetus, without which they just would not be in this position of a more coordinated and holistic approach to training and member development.

Learning and Development is Effective in Building Skills and Knowledge

- The council seeks formal feedback and evaluation through councillors as well as informally through officers, on how worthwhile the training is and if it is having an impact.
- Excellent participation levels of 37/40 councillors in the last six months, were highlighted, as a strong indicator of commitment as well testimony to the quality of the training provided. More informal training was also referenced and while not a formally recognised qualification, has received really positive feedback.
- The Council has robust checks and balances in place related to resource and budget with ongoing scrutiny by the EMDWG. Member development is also included in the business plan with its own performance indicator, which is reviewed every six months. The Corporate Strategy is also reflective through the collective leadership members' target, which members were involved in revising. Council set itself an 85%

engagement target and the importance of linking members needs to what the council is trying to achieve is clearly understood.

- The importance of the training for being effective in the role was stressed and well appreciated. Clearly understood that without the training, a councillor will be in a difficult position to do the job. Training is seen as key in ensuring councillors have the skill set for the role.
- In terms of impact, the proof is considered to be in the pudding, related to the decision making in the council chamber, the level of input on policy and procedures as well as the relationships.

‘If everybody knows what they are doing and how they should be doing ...
... Strengthens democracy...’

- There is a real appreciation of the continuous improvement nature of the Councillor Development Charter framework. It is recognised, that the current plan is suitable for the current membership and dynamics, however come the May 2023 elections, it will need to be aligned to what the new intakes needs are. It is also appreciated that it must be responsive to varying experience, in terms of new and more experienced members. A clear understanding was demonstrated that it is about:

‘Trying to get the new members up to scratch and keep those with experience ahead of the game. Trying to strike the fine balance of getting them up to speed without overwhelming them.’

- There is an understanding that members are good at telling the team what hasn’t worked well, with evaluation and feedback collated and tweaks fed through into delivery.
- Elected members themselves recognise the amount of work that has gone in to ensuring that it is member led and suits their needs. The impact of which, they feel, has played out in the chamber or committees, making the wider councillor body take notice of those members developing and thinking they should be doing this too. The overall profile of the training and the member development has dramatically risen with 37/40 councillors participating in something in the last six months, a realisation that it is in their interest to be involved.

Assessors' suggested improvement areas:

The following are areas that the Council should work towards over the next three years. They will act as a focus to take member development forward across the Council along with further improvement areas that the Council itself will identify between now and January 2026 that reflect emerging priorities.

- The Elected Member Development Steering Group should develop an annual work programme of priorities to ensure continued forward momentum for member development. This should also include a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of learning in relation to cost benefit analysis and impact. This will assist greatly in measuring and promoting the impact of elected member development.
- The council should strengthen the approach to commit to Personal Development Planning (PDP) programme to ensure engagement of “all” councillors and to identify new development priorities. Led by the EMDSG and supported by group leaders, the PDP approach should encourage and support the participation of all councillors to have access to a personal Development Plan. A target of 60-70% of Members having a Plan within 6 months of the May 2023 election.
- The Council should build on the momentum created by the pandemic on E-learning and further develop the Learning Management System to support a more strategic approach to E- Learning, that supports a range of member learning styles.
- Enhancement of the three-day induction programme to include the role of the councillor reflective of the 21st Century Councillor.
- The Elected Member Development Group should develop and lead an internal mentoring programme in preparation for providing newly elected Members following the May 2023 election, with structured mentor support.
- Continue to engage with Leadership Development to enhance strategic leadership and decision-making skills.

Charter Plus

A preliminary indication of the additional steps that the Council would need to demonstrate under each standard in order to achieve Charter plus status is set out below. NILGA would be happy to discuss these in more detail at any time, and further information is available via <https://www.nilga.org/councillor-charter/charter-for-councillor-development>

1. Commitment to councillor development and support

- Provide evidence that the budget is properly reviewed, set & prioritised by the Elected Member Development Group.
- Provide evidence that Member development/support staff have access to their own ongoing professional development.
- Provide evidence that Member development and support staff are involved in regional and national learning networks.
- Ensure that the Council promotes local democracy including events to encourage people and under-represented groups to engage with Council.

2. Strategic approach to councillor development

- Provide evidence of a robust evaluation process and that evaluation feedback contributes to the review and further development of the member development strategy. Some form of impact assessment at the community level would be required.
- Provide evidence that the senior management team meets to review member development at least once per year (to ensure ongoing linkage to corporate plan, to identify its impact and to suggest improvements).
- Provide evidence that members are clear about the role of partner bodies, other stakeholder bodies, their own role on partner bodies and their own role in relation to other stakeholder bodies.
- Provide evidence that at least 60% of Member's have in place a Personal Development Plan and review the plan annually.
- Provide evidence that external partners are involved in relevant development sessions.

- Provide evidence of leadership development to enhance strategic leadership and decision making skills..
- Provide evidence of a post induction meeting, held with new members 6 months after their election in order to identify any gaps in development and support.

3. Learning and development is effective in building capacity

- Provide evidence that end of event evaluation feeds into impact evaluation and to a review of the training programme.
- Provide evidence of post event follow-up evaluation to assess performance change (e.g. Through a PDP process).
- Provide evidence that Members report back to group on conferences and external development opportunities.

Congratulations on achieving the Charter standard!

The Council may use the national councillor development charter logo.

We look forward to the Council continuing to support NILGA in promoting the benefits of the Charter to councils across Northern Ireland.

The process of assessment undertaken in the Council may be subject to a quality assurance review by the Local Government Association.

Fiona Douglas
Regional Development Manager, NILGA
For and on behalf of the Assessment Team
March 2023

Skillgate Module Compliance Rate for Elected Members at at 12 October 2026

Skillgate Module	% Compliance
Anti-Bribery and Corruption (NI Edition)	15%
Conflict of Interest	3%
Data Protection and Freedom of Information Compliance following GDPR	15%
Disability Awareness (NI Edition)	23%
Introduction to Whistleblowing (NI Edition)	18%
Using Social Media Responsibly (NI Edition)	0%

APSE Annual Seminar 2026 – Delegate Report

Local Government on the Frontline – Meeting Challenges and Supporting Communities

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Liverpool – 16–17 September 2026

I attended the APSE Annual Seminar in Liverpool, which focused on the challenges facing local government and the delivery of frontline services, including finance, climate change, regeneration, communications, housing, leisure, infrastructure and community development.

The conference provided an opportunity to hear from local government representatives and sector specialists from across the UK, as well as to network with other elected members and local government professionals.

Key learning – Communication and managing change

One of the sessions I found most relevant was the keynote session on **“Communicating Change with Confidence: Leading Through Uncertainty in Local Government.”**

A number of points from this session were particularly relevant to the role of Council and elected members:

- **The importance of communicating early and consistently.** When information is unavailable, people will often create their own version of events. This can lead to speculation, rumour and anxiety.
- **The cost of silence.** The presenter highlighted the risks of allowing an issue to remain unanswered for a prolonged period. Silence can develop into rumour, which can then lead to anxiety and ultimately disengagement.
- **Getting ahead of the story.** Rather than allowing others to define an issue, organisations should communicate clearly and proactively, particularly when dealing with difficult decisions or changes to services.
- **From informing to involving.** There is a significant difference between simply telling people about a decision and actually involving them in the process. Engagement can help communities better understand and participate in change.
- **From control to consistency.** People do not necessarily expect organisations to have all the answers immediately, but they do value regular and consistent updates. Maintaining communication throughout a period of change can help build confidence and trust.
- The session used the analogy of a **lighthouse rather than a tour guide** – providing a visible, trusted point of reference and helping people navigate uncertainty rather than attempting to direct every step of the journey.

These principles could have relevance for Council communications, particularly around major projects, changes to services, consultations and issues which attract significant public interest.

Overall assessment

While there were some useful observations, particularly around communication and community engagement, **I was somewhat disappointed with the overall practical value of the conference from an elected member perspective.**

The programme covered a very broad range of subjects, but much of the content was presented at a relatively high or strategic level. I would have welcomed more practical examples of how individual councils had implemented changes, overcome challenges and delivered measurable improvements, particularly examples that could be directly applied within a Northern Ireland local government context.

There was also considerable emphasis on presentations and panel discussions, whereas I would have found **more practical workshops, case studies and opportunities to share specific solutions between councils** more beneficial.

Given the financial pressures facing local government, I would have particularly welcomed more detailed discussion around achieving efficiencies, improving frontline services with limited resources, income generation and examples of innovative approaches that could realistically be adopted by councils.

Conclusion

The conference did provide an opportunity to hear about some of the challenges facing local government across the UK and to network with colleagues from other authorities. The communication session provided some useful reminders about the importance of early, consistent and transparent communication, particularly when councils are dealing with change.

However, **I did not feel that a significant proportion of the wider programme provided sufficiently practical or locally applicable learning to justify the time and cost involved in attending.** For future conferences, I would favour a greater emphasis on practical case studies, measurable outcomes, innovative service delivery and solutions that can be directly considered by elected members and officers within a Northern Ireland council setting.