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STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

PROSPECTUS FOR 2026 CANDIDATES

DCN
DISTRICT COUNCILS' NETWORK



An Introduction

Run annually since 2014, the DCN's Staff Development Programme (SDP) a well-regarded opportunity for rising stars in DCN member councils to support their professional development and leadership potential.

The programme offers practical leadership development combined with valuable insights from experienced Chief Executives sharing their own journeys to senior leadership.

Applications close at **5pm on Monday 5 January 2026**. If you will struggle to meet this deadline - please contact dcn.sdp@local.gov.uk



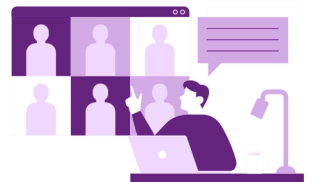
SDP has four main objectives

- i. Help participants become more familiar with the key policy and delivery issues facing councils and wider partners.
- ii. Help participants develop the skills to deal with the changing landscape of local government and become a leader.
- iii. Provide them with mentoring support during the programme.
- iv. Develop their understanding of national policy priorities and local implementation.

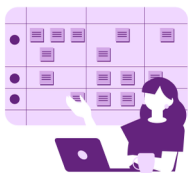
What are the main elements of the programme?



**Face-to-Face
development events**



Online webinars



Personal projects



Mentoring

The events

Series of four face-to-face professional development sessions (hosted in Westminster, London).

All sessions emphasise interactive learning with plenty of opportunities for group work and collaboration. Sessions feature inspiring speakers and engaging facilitators.

01

Your development within local government

A one-day event focusing on participants' career path through local government, with leadership skills development and knowledge content.

02

Working in a political environment

A one-day event to build strategic policy awareness and political environment skills.

03

Preparing for leadership

Interactive leadership role play event working in mock councils to tackle challenges and make decisions.

04

Reflection and Growth

A closing event to reflect on progress and identify next steps.

We also run a series of online webinars to support participants' professional development.

Your project

A self-directed professional development opportunity

Participants are expected to identify and lead a change or improvement initiative within their own council. This is an independent element of the programme that runs alongside the structured events.



Project info

Progress is your responsibility, though you can:

- **Discuss approaches with your mentor**
- **Share experiences with other participants**
- **Reflect on challenges during face-to-face events**
- **Connect with peers working on similar themes**

While some participants may choose to collaborate with colleagues from neighbouring councils, the primary focus is on developing your individual project management and leadership capabilities.

Mentoring

We will match you with a Chief Executive or senior officer from another council for the duration of the programme. Your mentor can offer valuable insights and perspectives on leadership in local government.

The frequency and format of meetings will be agreed between you and your mentor to suit both parties' schedules and preferences.

If you are a Chief Executive or senior officer who would like to volunteer to be a mentor, please get in touch at dcn.sdp@local.gov.uk

Selection criteria

If oversubscribed, selection ensures:

- Representation from across all regions
- Participation from as many councils as possible

We may prioritise candidates who:

- Are newer in their local government career
- Can clearly demonstrate what they hope to learn and contribute



Costs

The fee is £515 +VAT per participant.

This covers attendance and hospitality at all in-person events.

Get in touch

For questions about SDP: dcn.sdp@local.gov.uk

Updates: <https://www.districtcouncils.info/staff-development-programme/>