

District Councils' Network Staff Development Programme Prospectus 2023



1. An introduction to the Staff Development Programme

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

We've had an exciting year running the programme for 2022, after a brief pause during the pandemic. Our team is looking forward to welcoming a new round of participants for 2023.

"In truth, I have the programme to thank for landing my new head of service position."
- 2022 Participant



2. SDP Objectives

The SDP has four main aims:

- i. Help participants to become more familiar with the key policy and delivery issues facing councils and wider partners and give them the strategic knowledge they need to succeed within local government.
- ii. Help participants develop the skills to deal with the changing landscape of local government and become a leader.
- iii. Provide them with a Chief Executive or senior officer mentor for support, guidance and advice.
- iv. Develop their experience of working with central government and understanding of national policy and priorities.



3. Application process

We ask that all applicants are sponsored by a chief executive or senior member of staff.

As the programme is very popular and is usually oversubscribed, we'll prioritise applications to ensure as many member councils as possible have the chance to participate. The maximum number of participants on this scheme will be around 80.

Depending on the number of applications, we may need to conduct an informal selection process based on the content of applications received.

We also ask that your council commits to releasing successful applicants for each of the events and supports them in meeting with their mentor so that participants can gain the most value from the programme.

The deadline for applying to the 2023 SDP is 6pm on Friday 16 December 2022.

Applications can be submitted online: [DCN 2023 SDP Application Form](#)

4. Benefits of participating in the SDP

"My experience on the programme was one I would recommend to anyone wishing to challenge themselves whilst learning new skills" – 2022 Participant

The programme has consistently received positive feedback from participants. It's a unique opportunity for staff from member councils across the country to come together and learn from each other, and to develop their understanding of the wider policy and political context for local government, as well as their own leadership skills.

5. Overview of the Staff Development Programme:

A. Series of face-to-face professional development sessions (hosted in London)

There will be at least three themed professional development sessions. All sessions will have an emphasis on being highly interactive, with plenty of opportunities for group work and collaboration. There will be inspiring speakers and engaging facilitators.

- **Event 1: Your development within local government** (April 2023)

A one-day event focusing on participants' career path through local government, with a mixture of leadership skills'-based work and knowledge content. This includes sessions of driving collaboration, navigating local politics, developing leadership skills, and affecting change.



- **Event 2: Working in a political and policy orientated environment** (June 2023)

A one-day event to build strategic policy awareness as well as to support participants with the skills they need to work within a political environment. This could include an introduction to key national policy priorities, topical areas of concern for districts, and consideration of how to translate national policy priorities to the local level and vice versa.

- **Event 3:**

Part 1: Leadership Challenge - Becoming a senior leader for the day

Part 2: Reflecting on the Leadership Challenge and next steps for driving your development (October 2023)

Taking place across two days, the final event involves an externally run leadership role play event, where candidates work in teams to tackle challenges, engage, influence and negotiate with partners and politicians, and take difficult decisions.

The second day is then a closing event to reflect on progress and support participants to identify their next steps, and consider how their roles fit with the strategic aims of their council.



“This programme has been hugely beneficial to me both professionally and personally.”
- 2022 Participant

In addition to in-person sessions, we are also planning some online events to support participants' professional development and policy knowledge.

B. A project to introduce an improvement in the participant's own council

Participants are expected to identify, plan and implement real-life change in their own council for their project. The projects will have a strong emphasis on collaboration – and instead of individual projects, participants from neighbouring councils may choose to work together on a single project to deliver wider change across boundaries.

The face-to-face events will then support them with implementing their projects by including opportunities to reflect, discuss and share their learning and challenges with their peers through

action learning sets.

C. Mentoring

We've previously used an extensive network of mentors who provide valuable advice and encouragement to participants. Mentors are senior officers (including Chief Executives, Directors and Heads of Service) from DCN member councils who volunteer to mentor one or two participants from the programme.

We assign mentors to participants on the programme and encourage them to build these relationships and take responsibility for meeting during the programme. As well as meeting regularly, participants and mentors may like to arrange exchanges, visits or placements.

Our team is always looking for more mentors to support of programme participants. If anyone at your councils is interested in volunteering to be a mentor, please get in touch.

D. Potential work shadowing across Whitehall

We're in discussion with DLUHC to hopefully to once again offer each participant the opportunity to shadow a senior civil servant for two days across the 12 months of the programme. This element has worked well in its trial year and discussions with Whitehall are positive; we're also about to launch our reciprocal arrangement, whereby civil servants will be visiting districts to learn more about our work.

6. Selection criteria

In the event that the programme is oversubscribed, the DCN central team will need to undertake a short selection process to allocate places. Anyone who is not offered a place can be prioritised for the following year's programme.

Selection would be based on ensuring we achieve:

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

We may prioritise candidates who:

- Are newer in their local government career, regardless of their age.
- Can clearly demonstrate what they hope to learn from participating, and what they will contribute to the programme.

7. Cost

To help cover the costs of running the programme, we do charge a small fee to each participant's council. The fee covers attendance and hospitality at all in-person events and **includes an overnight stay** for the 2-day learning event, but it excludes any cost of travel to the face-to-face events. We believe that this represents fantastic value for money.

The fee will be £360 + VAT per participant.

We don't want any member councils to miss out though, so if the cost is prohibitive, please get in touch.

8. Getting in touch

You can reach us any time on dcn@local.gov.uk

Keep up to date with the SDP on our website: <https://districtcouncils.info/staff-development/staff-development-programme-2/>