The Highland Council

Committee: **Highland Council**

Date: **26 March 2026**

Report Title: **Members' Learning and Development 2025/2026**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate**

1   Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   The effectiveness of the Council depends on the knowledge, confidence and capability of its elected Members. Members bring significant experience, insight, and commitment to public service, and ensuring they are well supported in their roles is essential to strong local leadership and good governance.

1.2   This report provides an update on Members' Learning and Development (L&D) delivered between December 2024 and December 2025, in line with the 2025 Programme approved by Council in December 2024.

1.3   It also presents the refreshed Learning and Development Framework and the outline Programme for 2026, together with targeted improvement actions arising from evaluation and Member feedback.

1.4   Further engagement is planned during 2026 to support delivery of the Programme and to shape the revised Induction and L&D Programme for 2027.

2   Recommendations

2.1   Members are asked to:

   i.   **Approve** the refreshed Members' Learning and Development Framework and outline L&D Programme for 2026;
   ii.   **Agree** the targeted improvement actions incorporated into the Programme for 2026;
   iii.   **Agree** that Committee Chairs, in consultation with Members, finalise and publish Committee specific learning pathways by June 2026;
   iv.   **Note** further planned engagement with Members to shape the ongoing Programme for 2026 and the revised Induction and L&D Programme for 2027; and
   v.   **Agree** that an annual update report is presented to Council in December 2026.

3   Implications

3.1   **Resource -** The Members' L&D budget is modest. Any additional resource required in 2026 will be met from existing service budgets. Officer time from People Development, Senior Leadership Support, Legal, Democratic, Communications and Corporate Management Support will be required to support Programme delivery.

3.2   **Legal -** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Mandatory training requirements apply to Members serving on the Licensing Board and those involved in planning decisions. The Programme supports compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance.

3.3   **Risk -** Failure to ensure appropriate governance and scrutiny presents significant legal, financial and reputational risk. The L&D Programme is a key mechanism for mitigating these risks.

3.4   **Health and Safety** (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - No direct Health and Safety implications arise. The Programme includes training on Member safety.

3.5   **Gaelic -** There are no direct Gaelic implications. The Programme provides opportunities to develop awareness and skills in line with the Council's Gaelic Language Plan.

4   Impacts

4.1   In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2   Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3   Integrated Impact Assessment – Summary

4.3.1   An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on the Member Learning and Development Programme for 2026.

4.3.2   Screening concluded there are potential positive impacts as a result of the existing programme in relation to equality and children's rights impacts, mainly related to improving Member understanding. The assessment identified 3 key areas for development, summarised in **Appendix 1**, and incorporated into the programme.

4.3.3

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment
Equality	- Children and Young People – Positive impact - Children affected by disability – Positive impact

	• Older adults – Positive impact
Socio-economic	Positive following inclusion of additional training activity
Human Rights	No Impact
Children's Rights and Well-being	Indirect positive impacts
Island and Mainland Rural	No Impact
Climate Change	No impact
Data Rights	No Impact

5 Members' Learning and Development Framework

5.1 [The Members' Learning and Development Framework](#) is made available to all newly elected and existing Members as part of induction and ongoing development. It sets out the core expectations for learning across a Member's term of office, including induction learning, advisory and committee specific requirements, and broader continuous development opportunities.

5.2 The Framework was refreshed in 2025 following consultation with a Members' Short Life Working Group, officers across Service Clusters, and the Improvement Service. Key enhancements included the addition of guidance on the support available from Community Development Managers and a strengthened focus on local-level engagement.

6 Learning and Development Delivery in 2025

6.1 During 2025, the Programme comprised two all Member events: a full day session in April and a half day session in November.

6.2 The Spring Members' development event held on 24 April 2025 provided Members with key updates on strategic direction, governance expectations, and core operational responsibilities. Sessions included an overview of the Council's future priorities, guidance on corporate governance and the Code of Conduct, and practical inputs on Members' enquiries, communications, information governance, corporate finance, and treasury management.

6.3 The Members' development event held on 27 November 2025 provided focused updates across key service areas. Presentations covered developments within Health, Social Care and the Integrated People Service; an overview of current priorities within Communities; and updates from HR and Communications. The session supported Members' awareness of ongoing operational activity and service challenges. IT support was also made available prior to the session to assist Members with device related queries.

6.4 Between December 2024 and December 2025, 15 e-learning course completions/attempts were recorded on the Traineasy platform. These included advisory modules such as *Members' Scrutiny Role* and *Equalities Training for Elected Members*, as well as modules on *Cybersecurity Awareness* and *Head Teacher / Depute Head Teacher Recruitment*.

6.5 Some additional learning opportunities, particularly those arising from Strategic Committees and the Audit Committee, may not have been captured centrally. To improve monitoring and ensure a comprehensive record of Members' learning, all activity, regardless of source, will be recorded as part of the Programme going forward.

6.6 All training during 2025/26 was delivered either in person, via Microsoft Teams or in a blended format. Where possible, sessions were recorded and uploaded to the Members' intranet for later access.

7. Attendance and Engagement

7.1 Attendance varied across sessions, though available records indicate a modest improvement in participation during 2024. Hybrid delivery helped extend access, and the availability of recorded materials on the Members' intranet further supported engagement.

7.2 Further work is planned to strengthen consistency in attendance monitoring and to improve the accessibility and visibility of learning opportunities.

8. Evaluation and Outcomes

8.1 Post session feedback forms and pulse surveys were used to assess learning outcomes. Members reported strengthened understanding of governance, scrutiny, and the practical application of Integrated Impact Assessments.

8.2 Areas identified for improvement included:

- Better alignment of session timing with Member availability
- Increased use of practical case studies
- Provision of follow up microlearning and short refresher opportunities.

8.3 These insights have informed the development of targeted improvements within the 2026 Programme.

9. Focus for Members' Learning and Development in 2026

9.1 Ensuring Members have access to high-quality learning and development is essential for supporting them to fulfil their roles effectively. A short survey conducted following the April 2025 all Members event shaped the content of the November event. As subsequent survey engagement was limited, further discussions were held with the Governance Review Steering Group in January and March 2025.

9.2 It is proposed that a similar approach be adopted for 2026, with sessions focusing on:

- Declarations of Interest and Gifts/Hospitality
- Governance, Conduct, and Scrutiny
- Budget and Financial Management
- The Use of Artificial Intelligence
- Welfare and Benefits

- Managing Correspondence
- Member Safety and Security.

9.3   Where possible, the Improvement Service and external guest speakers will be invited to support delivery of these sessions.

9.4   The Governance Review Steering Group identified the need for enhanced training on planning for 2026. Planning Aid Scotland, who delivered planning training in 2022, are developing updated materials to support the 2027 local government elections. Officers are exploring opportunities to trial these new materials in Highland during 2026.

9.5   Given recent changes to the membership of the Corporate Resources Appeals Sub Committee, bespoke refresher training will be offered to Members involved in considering personnel appeals.

9.6   Members also expressed interest in practical sessions on navigating the new Council website, accessing learning resources through Traineasy and understanding the Council's structure and responsibilities.

9.7   To support Members in accessing online learning, a dedicated briefing will be arranged to demonstrate Traineasy's functionality and highlight available modules. Additional one-to-one support will be offered where required.

10.   Continued Member Engagement

10.1   Further engagement will take place during 2026 to confirm priority areas for learning and development and to ensure the Programme remains responsive to Member needs.

10.2   Work is also underway to develop the Induction and Learning and Development Programme for 2027. Drawing on the experience, insights and expertise of outgoing elected Members will ensure that the Programme for newly elected Members is well-informed, relevant and aligned with the priorities identified through Member engagement.

11.   Outline Members' Learning and Development Programme for 2026

11.1   The 2026 Programme will be delivered through a mix of the following approaches:

- Briefings and webinars on topical issues
- Guidance on key areas of Members' work
- Subject specific training
- Bespoke and tailored support as required

11.2   Delivery will be offered through Microsoft Teams, in person sessions, or blended formats depending on the topic and intended outcomes. Recordings will be made available where appropriate.

11.3   Monitoring and evaluation will continue to form a core part of the Framework. Members will receive feedback forms following each session to support continuous improvement.

11.4   Online resources, including recordings and e-learning opportunities, will continue to be available via the Members' Intranet and the Traineasy platform, which is regularly updated with new modules.

11.5   The Programme for 2026 will include:

- An all-Members event delivered in two parts
- Core governance modules (Code of Conduct; Declarations; Governance and Scrutiny; Budget and Financial Management)
- Thematic sessions (AI in the Council; Welfare and Benefits; Managing Correspondence; Member Safety)
- Targeted and bespoke support (planning refresher using Planning Aid Scotland's trial materials; Appeals Subcommittee training).

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

Date: 6 March 2026

Author: Isabel McLellan – Business Manager

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Summary

A screening for impact has been carried out on the Learning and Development Programme for 2025/26. This highlighted:

- **Equality and Poverty**
  Potential positive impacts as a result of the existing programme, which provides for specific equality training for Members and therefore builds learning and understanding amongst Members regarding the equality agenda, supporting decision making.

  The screening does note that work is required to review how best to support Members with work/caring responsibilities to ensure they can access the same training opportunities. This should be considered by the Governance Review Steering Group.

  No specific poverty impacts were identified however it is proposed to incorporate poverty informed practice training as part of the programme, supporting Members in their understanding of poverty, and decision making.

- **Children's Rights**

  Indirect positive impacts were identified through the screening which was based on the existing programme assisting to build member understanding of children's rights, for example through the corporate parenting programme.

  It is proposed to enhance this with provision of specific training in children's rights during the 2025/26 programme.