

Charter Implementation Group – 16 December 2009

Minutes of the meeting of the **Charter Implementation Group** held on **16 December 2009** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr C I Black
Cllr T G Cutmore

Cllr Mrs G A Lucas-Gill
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr D J Cottis
Mrs L Walker

VISITING MEMBER

M G Drage

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Fowler - Head of Customer and Information Services
M Power - Committee Administrator

9 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 August 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10 CHARTER FOR ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

Members reviewed the draft Action Plan in conjunction with an Officer Comment and Suggested Actions document, which related to items on the Action Plan that had actions that need to be completed by December 2009. Included under each of the items were suggestions from officers that the Group considered.

Item 1.6 (Action 1) CIG to consider possibilities, for instance, encouraging Councillors attending visits, such as Southampton Airport/recycling plants, to disseminate their learning via, say, written briefings in the Members' Bulletin.

- It was recognised that Members of Outside Bodies should share any relevant information, including newsletters and leaflets, which could be stored in a file in the Members' lounge or library.
- Regarding the possibility of introducing a 'sharing learning from external events' form, the following was observed:-
 - A form would be a useful way of providing feedback.
 - The following could also be included on the form: quality of the event; relevance to the role of Member; role of attendee (e.g. District/Parish)

Councillor, Independent Member of the Standards Committee). It might also be useful in respect of following up comments made on the form to include an option for Members to add their name to the form. This would be optional. An 'any other comments' box could also be added to the bottom of the form.

- The form could be issued on a trial basis.
- It should be emphasised to the trainer that courses should be kept to a maximum of 2 and a half hours in duration. It was noted, however, that not all courses could be delivered in such a time slot and that, depending on the way any individual training session went and the number of questions asked, it was not always possible for a course to finish in this timescale.
- Interactive training should be considered as an alternative to training using PowerPoint presentations.

Item 1.6 (Action 2) To investigate the possibility of improving the system of feeding back information from Outside Body activity, such as utilising Full Council meetings.

- It would be appropriate for the proposed system of feeding back information from Outside Body activity through Full Council meetings, as detailed in the report, to be introduced from the start of the next municipal year. It was suggested that a written report instead of a verbal report may be a preferable option of feeding back the information for some Members.
- It was recognised that the Council also may have information it would wish to feed back to Outside Bodies.

Item 2.5 (Action 3) Plan of training dates made available at the beginning of each calendar year, particularly around mandatory training.

Following review of the plan of training dates for Member Learning and Development Programme 2010/11, it was observed that:-

- The 'Tour of the District' date, attendance at which qualifies as 2 hours of mandatory planning training, should be established with the Head of Planning & Transportation and included in the list of training dates for 2010/11 to be sent to Members.
- There should be a check that the mandatory planning training on 12/10/10 does not clash with the 2009 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees that is attended by some Members of the Standards Committee and that the proposed dates for training in May and July do not clash with World Cup football dates.
- 'Scrutiny training' should be referred to as 'Review Committee training'.

Item 2.6 Appropriately learn with external partners

It was agreed that the bullet points in the report be included in the Action Plan, with the following additions:-

- Invitations could be sought from other authorities for Rochford District Council Members to visit other authorities to observe how their meetings are run and to meet their Members.
- Planning visits to other authorities (including South Cambridgeshire and Brentwood Councils) had been previously undertaken. Also, joint Licensing training had taken place in recent years.

Item 2.8 Addresses political leadership and team development

It was agreed that the bullet points in the report be included in the Action Plan, with the following amendments:-

- The 4th bullet point should read 'Senior Management Team and the Executive Portfolio Holders have regular meetings'.
- The final bullet point should read, 'Member Away Days on the Budget for all Members of the Council'.

Item 2.9 Mechanisms for evaluation, and informing future plans, identified

Members reviewed the draft evaluation form, which would be completed by Members attending courses at the conclusion of each phase of training to evaluate the longer-term benefits of training. The following was observed:-

- At the top of the form next to Name should be the word 'optional', which would allow Members to remain anonymous if they so wished.
- A tick box should be placed alongside each of the named courses on page one of the form, to enable Members to indicate which of the courses they had attended.
- An electronic version of the form should be sent by email to those Members with email, which could be completed on-line and returned by email.
- A Rochford email address should be established for each Member, subject to agreement from the Members concerned. Emails addressed to these Members would be forwarded to the Committee team at the Council, who would print a copy for distribution to Members via the twice weekly courier run, subject again to the Members' agreement. This option should be considered and discussed with the relevant Members.
- Training on how to use emails for those Members who were interested could be considered.

Item 4.2 Learning is shared with other elected Members and, where appropriate, with officers and stakeholders

It was agreed that the bullet points in the report be included in the Action Plan, with the addition of the relevant points in Item 1.6 of the Action Plan.

Item 5.2 Reviews how Council business is conducted to allow for equality of access to key political decision making mechanisms.

It was agreed that the bullet points in the report be included in the Action Plan, with the following additions:-

- Minutes of previous Area Committee meetings are available at the meetings for members of the public.
- The function of Area Committees and the successes achieved to date could be explained in more detail in Rochford District Matters (RDM).
- Advertising of Area Committees could be expanded, for example a prominent advertisement in RDM entitled 'Are you getting the best out of your Council?'

Item 5.3 Holds events for the community to encourage people to become community leaders.

It was agreed that the bullet points in the report be included in the Action Plan.

It was recognised that youth liaison was very important to encourage the emergence of future Councillors. The voices of youth groups, for example, school councils and scout groups, should be heard and these groups should be encouraged to attend Council meetings wherever possible.

Action (3) Information for prospective candidates standing for election.

Members reviewed the draft 'Guide for Candidates on being a Member of Rochford District Council'. It was observed that:-

- In the Introduction, reference should be made to the importance the Council places in working with its partners.
- The paragraph detailing that local government is either unitary or two-tier should be in plain English and provide detailed explanation. Reference should also be made to the role of the Town/Parish Councils.
- Reference should be made to District/Borough Councils.
- The paragraph concerned with travelling allowances should be amended to make it clear that a travelling allowance is payable only in respect of reasonable travel expenses incurred by Councillors in the course of their attendance at Council meetings.

- Additional information should be added to the paragraph on the Development Control Committee to the effect that all Councillors are appointed to this Committee. There should also be an explanation of the meaning of pre-determination in planning meetings and that there is no party 'whip' in operation in respect of individual planning applications.
- Once further changes have been made to the draft Candidate Guide by officers, the finalised version would be available for use. However, feedback would always be welcome on ways of improving the Guide.

11 PART 3 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Members considered proposals for Part 3 of the Member Learning and Development Programme for 2009/10. Development requests from individual Members, taken from the 2009/10 self assessment questionnaires, had been summarised in an appendix to the report and were considered by the Group.

- It was noted that information received from the IDeA in respect of the proposed Speed Reading course indicated that it would not be possible to condense the course into a 2-hour session. Instead, it would be expected that the course duration would be in the region of 5 hours with a buffet break half way through. Members expressed concern at having a course of this length and requested that the IDeA be contacted to see if any alternative arrangements could be made.
- It was suggested that the Member Development Policy document be amended to add that it is recommended that Review Committee Members attend the training that is specifically organised for them as part of the training programme.

Recommended to the Standards Committee

That the Part 3 Member Development Programme 2009/10 be approved, taking into consideration the suggested courses outlined in paragraph 3.3 of the report, as well as the individual requests received from Members in the 2009/10 assessment as set out in the Appendix.

The meeting closed at 9:11 pm.

Chairman

Date

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