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## CHARTER FOR ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report considers options in relation to the recommendations emanating from the assessors' report following the recent award of the Charter for Elected Member Development.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Council achieved the South East Employers (SEE) Charter for Elected Member Development in October 2010. Charter status was awarded for three years and a review of the Council's learning and development arrangements after 18 months took place.
- 2.2 Last year the Council committed to renew the Charter and a full day's assessment took place on 14 January 2014. SEE advised that their focus would be to identify Rochford's 'direction of travel' in Member training and ascertain whether or not the Council continued to meet the Charter standard since it was first awarded in 2010.
- 2.3 At the end of the assessment day, the SEE team advised that the Council clearly meets the assessment criteria for the Charter and the Council was awarded Charter status for a further three years. Cllr Tony Jackson, Chairman of East of England Local Government Association, will be presenting the Charter award at Full Council on 15 April.
- 2.4 The subsequent assessment report sent to the Council detailed the Council's key strengths in Member training and recommendations for future improvement and focus. This has been circulated to all Members and a copy is appended to this report.
- 2.5 The key recommendation in the report from the assessment team is for a small cross-party Member Development Steering Group to be established to champion and support member development. It is envisaged that this group would have 3-5 Members and would be established by the end of June 2014. It was the opinion of the assessors that such a group would strengthen the strategic approach to Member development. This group would take responsibility for determining the annual Member Training programme.
- 2.6 It was also recommended that the introduction of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) for Members be implemented. The PDP process involves reflection on what the Member has done in the past 12 months, what learning has been undertaken and how this has helped them in their role. PDPs are designed so that individual Councillors can identify their own development requirements and a plan can be drawn up to meet these needs. In this way the Council can contribute to an elected Member's development in key areas to assist in confidence building and developing future competence.

- 2.7 As well as PDPs, the assessors asked the Council to consider piloting a 360 degree process in Member development with a pilot group of Councillors. 360 degree feedback is a performance appraisal system where the Councillor requests feedback from a number of contributors including, for example, Group Leader, fellow Ward Member, outside body, lead officer or constituent. The Councillor rates his/her own skills and emails a questionnaire to the list of people they have chosen. The aim of the 360 degree process is to provide individual Councillors with information on their skills, performance and development needs from the feedback they receive from these contributors.
- 2.8 Other Councils who have introduced PDPs and 360 degree feedback have been approached to get a flavour of their experience and to see what benefits they felt have been achieved by their introduction. Of the four Councils that responded, two were County Councils, one a unitary authority and one a District Council. These four Councils are all larger than Rochford and have significantly higher Member training budgets than Rochford. One Council was extremely positive about the success of PDPs for their Councillors and had also trialled 360 degree assessments with Members of their Executive. This Council has a dedicated Member trainer. Another Council summarised its experience of the introduction of PDPs as expensive and not well received by their Members; its Members were not keen either to adopt a 360 degree process. One of the County Councils that responded uses a consultant to carry out the PDPs and 360 interviews, which is expensive. The final Council we heard from has been running PDPs for Members for 5 years and has undertaken a trial of 360 degree assessment with Executive Members using a tool developed by a consultant.
- 2.9 In summary, although the implementation of a system of PDPs for Members and/or introducing 360 degree feedback can have benefits, it is likely to be resource intensive and expensive and would not necessarily have an obvious benefit to Rochford District Council. The Member training budget for 2014/15 is £5,000, which has to cover all aspects of Member development. This is likely to be insufficient to implement the assessor recommendations around PDPs and 360 degree feedback.
- 2.10 On a positive note, the SEE assessment team reported that the Council's Member training programme continues to meet the standards of the Charter and is suitable for the needs of the authority. It can be seen, therefore, that maintaining the Charter is not key to continuing to provide good quality training for Members that is relevant to their role. Prior to achieving the Charter in 2010, the Council introduced mandatory training for Planning, Licensing and Appeals Committees. The mandatory planning training was amended further in 2012 to accommodate the need for more regular planning training sessions throughout the year.

### **3 OPTIONS AVAILABLE**

- 3.1 SEE have confirmed that the recommendation relating to setting up a separate Member Development Group was the settled view of the

assessment team as a means to further push forward member development within Rochford. However, this recommendation and the other recommendations will not affect Rochford's current Charter status should it be decided not to proceed with them. However, when the Council has the 18 month review meeting with SEE the assessors will be looking for evidence of progress made in these areas.

3.2 The Committee is asked to consider the following options:-

- That arrangements are kept as they are currently and the recommendations coming out of the recent Charter assessment are not implemented.
- That a cross-party Member Development Steering Group is established to provide direction in Member training and to determine the annual Member Learning and Development programme lead on and support Member Development but that the other assessor recommendations are not implemented at this time. This steering group could come under the auspices of an appropriate Portfolio Holder by way of an Advisory Group.
- That ways of implementing the recommendations in the assessment report are investigated to see how to best this can be achieved within the budget and officer resource available.

#### **4 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 South East Employers have confirmed that Charter status is not dependent on the Council achieving the recommendations from the recent assessment.

#### **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Any cost relating to Member development will be taken from the overall Member training budget, which is £5,000 for 2014/15.

#### **6 RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 It is proposed that the Committee determines the way forward and **RECOMMENDS** to Full Council accordingly.

Albert Bugeja

Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services

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**Background Papers:-**

None.

For further information please contact Michelle Power on:-

Phone: 01702 318179

Email: [michelle.power@rochford.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.power@rochford.gov.uk)

If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.



**East of England Charter for Elected Member Development**

**Rochford District Council**

**Assessment Date 14 January 2014**



**Rochford District Council  
East of England Charter for Elected Member Development**

**Assessment Date: 14 January 2014**

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## Recommendation of the Assessment Team

Rochford District Council continues to meet the standard of the East of England Charter for Elected Member Development and has been awarded Charter status for three years from the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

The Council clearly meets the assessment criteria for the Charter. Throughout the day, and from the majority of the interviews conducted, the Team felt from the evidence presented to them, the Council has a real opportunity to move forward the engagement and involvement of its Councillors and to influence and shape their role, though member development.

The key recommendation is for the Council to establish a small cross party bespoke Member Development Steering Group to champion and support member development across the Council. The Team would like to see this progressed by the end of June 2014.

The continuing progress of the Council in taking forward the improvement recommendations will be discussed with the Council in eighteen months' time and a re-assessment in full against the Charter standards will be required in 2017.

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 South East Employers website ([www.seemp.co.uk](http://www.seemp.co.uk)) should the Council commit to Charter Plus, then it will have 18 months from the date of sign up to assessment in order to achieve the status. The timetable indicated above for re-assessment against the normal Charter in 2017 will no longer apply.

### Assessment team

- Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning, Bracknell Forest Council
- Paul Wickenden, Democratic Services Manager (Members), Kent County Council
- Mark Palmer, Development Director, South East Employers (Lead Assessor) South East Employers

### Charter standards

- Commitment to Councillor development
- Strategic approach to Councillor development
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity
- Supporting Councillors

## Assessment

The assessment took place on 14 January 2014 to determine whether or not the Council continued to meet the Charter standard which it was first awarded in 2010. The assessment was based on an analysis of a portfolio of evidence, a number of interviews with key personnel and an elected member workshop. The assessors' objectives were to verify the evidence in the portfolio and to identify the Council's future plans for continuous improvement to Member learning and development.

The evidence presented in the portfolio was drawn from a wide range of sources and gave a good overall view of Member Development activities at Rochford District Council. It was clearly linked to the relevant Charter standards.

The following people were seen during the assessment visit:

Interviews (in order conducted):

- Albert Bugeja, Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services
- John Bostock, Member Services Manager
- Michelle Power, Committee Administrator
- Councillor Terry Cutmore, Leader of the Council
- Mr Amar Dave, Chief Executive
- **Standards Committee Members** – Councillors – Mrs Heather Glynn, Mrs Jill Lucas-Gill, Mrs Christine Mason, Mr David Merrick, Mr Mike Steptoe, and **Independent Persons** – Mr David Cottis, Mr Maurice Drage, Mr Stan Shadbolt and Mrs Lyn Walker.
- Officer, Front Line Services, Mr Shaun Scrutton
- Leaders of the Opposition Parties – Councillor Chris Black, Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor John Mason, Rochford Residents Association and Councillor Michael Hoy, Green Party.
- Workshop: Representative group of Councillors – Mr Brian Hazelwood, Mrs Diane Hoy, Mr Ron Oatham, Mr Dave Sperring, Mr Ian Ward and Mrs Barbara Wilkins.

Rochford District Council made a re-commitment to the East of England Charter for Elected Member Development in 2013. The re-commitment to the Charter was supported by all political groups and officers from Member Services and was overseen by the Standards Committee. This approach ensured that there was effective support for councillors to work towards the re-commitment to the Charter.

The Assessment Team heard of the valuable officer support provided to them by Albert Bugeja, John Bostock and Michelle Power. Assessors were appreciative of those same officers' help in organising a well structured and welcoming assessment day.



## Standards Committee

The Standards Committee currently has the remit for elected member development as part of its terms of reference. It was clear from the portfolio of evidence presented to the Assessment Team that the Standards Committee had played a key role in the Council's application for re-accreditation against the Charter Standard. The Committee had been very strong on member development for the Member Code of Conduct, Licensing, Planning and other regulation issues. The Assessors heard throughout the day of the innovative approach to training and development that had re-enforced the key principles of the member code of conduct, by using officers to role play in a film.

Whilst the Assessment Team acknowledged that there was a clear Member commitment to Member Development, early on in the Assessment day they formed a view that in their opinion, for the Council to build on the excellent foundations it had achieved with member development the Council should be encouraged to look at the member structure for supporting and leading member development. It is the Assessment Team view that the Council would benefit from the establishment of a small bespoke cross party Member Development Steering Group.

## Evidence presented and demonstrated to support the application

### ▪ **Commitment to Councillor Development**

Rochford District Councils' re-commitment to the Charter demonstrates and recognises the importance of well supported Members in order to achieve the corporate objectives and strategic priorities of the Council. The Assessment Team acknowledged the Member development support across each of the three main corporate objectives for 2013 - 2018:

- Making a difference to our community
- Making a difference to our environment
- Making a difference to our local economy

The value and commitment to member development was recognised across each of the political groups with recognition of the excellent training for conduct of councillors, planning and overview and scrutiny. However, Leaders of the Opposition parties informed the Assessment Team that whilst all councillors were asked for their input into the development of the training programme they felt that they did not have the opportunity to influence the final programme which they had found disappointing. Whilst Opposition party Leaders acknowledged that all councillors were surveyed for their views on what should be included in the member development programme none of the suggestions put forward by the Opposition party Leaders had been included in the member development programme.

Managerial commitment was demonstrated from the Chief Executive who was new in post. He indicated to the Assessment Team that he wanted Rochford District Council to be the best Council and for the Councils' Member Development programme to be the best. He spoke about the importance of the councillor role being appropriately supported to respond to the challenges the Council will face in moving forward. He emphasised the importance of the Councils customers, the residents of Rochford, and gave an example of how one of the Cabinet Members and he had responded to various flooding issues in the District on New Years Eve and New Years Day. He indicated that he was working with the Strategic Management Team on this new approach to customer engagement.

The commitment to Member development is supported by a budget of over £8,000 in two separate allocations £5,000 specifically for Member training and £3000 for the Review Committee training. This represents a significant sum for a District Council. The Assessment Team heard clear evidence throughout the day that this sum was sustainable, going forward, but they did question why there was a need for two separate budgets or whether it would be more appropriate to have it as one budget for member development.

### **Things that we heard:**

“As Leader of the Council I make a point of going to all the training sessions”

“The Council has quality officers – it is about how the officers can adapt and respond to the challenges of the Council going forward”

“For newly elected members of the Council we need to understand what they want to achieve and support them with member development accordingly”

“There should be 100% participation in Personal Development Plans when working in the public arena where we are subject to challenge and accountability”

#### ▪ **Strategic approach to Councillor Development**

Members were clear that the focus on Member development had changed and developed since the Council was first awarded the Charter in 2010. Member development was a key part of the Council activities and this was evidenced through the Councils’ re-commitment to the Member Development Charter.

The Assessors found it difficult to validate the evidence in the portfolio during their interview with Members of the Standards Committee, especially around their involvement in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of member development activities. The Assessment Team were of the settled opinion that a small bespoke cross party group would strengthen the strategic approach to member development for which the Standards Committee had built sound foundations.

Learning needs are identified via individual and collective development needs analysis. The Assessment Team heard that 63% of councillors had participated in this process, but, there was still scope for improved engagement.

The Assessment Team felt that to introduce a structured approach to Personal Development Planning (PDP) linked to the LGA Political Skills Framework would assist the Council going forward.

Throughout the day the Assessment Team heard of the excellent training available, the majority of which was provided ‘in-house’ but with some external assistance – overview and scrutiny was often referred to by councillors where there had been some external input.

The Assessment Team felt that the programme of member development would be strengthened and the offer improved if there was a positive step to include more external peer challenge.

**Things that we heard:**

“The Council receives more compliments than complaints and is an indication that the opportunity for councillors to participate in training is effective”

“The Council provides some excellent training relating to the Council budget which is clearly aligned to the corporate objectives of the Council”

“Continuing Officer/Member training was a strength for the Council”

“The budget is a means to an end it is important that we ensure that there are adequate resources to make a difference for the residents of Rochford”

“I would like the Council to consider using the 360 degree process to strengthen member development”

“The face to face contact with the Rochford residents was key to the Council moving forward and the Strategic Management Team is working hard to see this embedded in the culture of the Council”

“I want the Council to be ambitious so that other local authorities say how does Rochford do that?”

▪ **Learning and Development is Effective in Building Capacity**

The Standards Committee determines the strategy and the learning and development programme for the Council.

The Council sets aside and publicises fixed dates for development activities, which it uses to meet identified priority learning needs.

The Assessors noted that should Members be unavailable to attend one of the training and development events then “mop up sessions” are arranged.

The Assessment Team were of the view that the Council should consider identifying the wider impact of member development. Particularly in relation to how it has supported more effective partnership and stakeholder working and engagement.

The Assessment Team heard little about any shared training and development with other District Councils, but, it was acknowledged by Members and Officers as an area for further consideration when moving forward. There are a number of councillors who are also Essex County Councillors. The cross fertilisation of ideas between both Councils could be invaluable.

One recurring theme throughout the day from a number of the interviewees was the innovative and interactive way training around code of conduct had been delivered using an 'in-house' made film. The Council should build on this in other areas to improve councillor engagement and respond to the different learning styles of members.

The Assessment Team also welcomed the proposal to explore other methods of training and development including an 'e-learning' programme.

In one of the interviews and the workshop session with Councillors the Assessment Team heard from a number of councillors that what was missing from the programme was a session around the governance framework in which the Council operated including the procedural rules.

**Things that we heard:**

"I have a greater understanding of the issues and the ability to problem solve"

"Member development has supported me to become an effective conduit between the communities I represent and the Council"

"The member development programme has improved my knowledge and as a consequence I believe I am a more effective councillor"

"The training delivered for councillors around Standards and their conduct by using a video was memorable"

The Council should consider using a more formal evaluation framework that measures knowledge/skills at the start and end of development activities to more specifically identify the benefits involved and ensure this is embedded in an agreed PDP process for all Members.

The Council should also consider piloting the 360 degree process with a pilot group of councillors.

▪ **Supporting Councillors**

The Assessors were satisfied that all councillors have equal access to Council premises, facilities to develop opportunities suitable for the roles they occupy. However, Leaders of Opposition parties were disappointed that none of their suggestions for inclusion in the training programme had been taken up.

The Assessment Team acknowledged the support that officers gave to all councillors.

### **Things that we heard:**

“Michelle Power and John Bostock are very supportive and provide us with the answers to the Member development queries we raise”

“I would welcome the opportunity of one to one development and PDP’s”

“We need to develop a programme that is interactive and build on the successful ‘in-house’ video concept used for some training”

“Officers who delivered the training events were very knowledgeable”

“Member/Officer relations are valued”

### **Continuous improvement and direction of travel**

Rochford District Council has been successful in achieving the standards of the Charter.

#### **Strengths**

The following areas were felt by the Assessors to be particular strengths:

- It was clear from all the interviews which the assessment Team conducted that there was political commitment from all the Political Group Leaders and the Chief Executive as well as the Officer Team directly supporting member development Albert Bugeja, John Bostock and Michelle Power;
- The Assessment Team heard that there are two budgets for member development and training that amount to £8000c. This represented an increase on previous years funding. The Team were reassured that this budget would be sustainable for future years;
- Members spoke of the effective officer support for member development and the excellent relationship there was between members and officers;
- The member development programme had been developed from an evidence based training needs analysis which reflected the strategic and corporate objectives of the Council;
- The member development process was member led and overseen by the Standards Committee; and

- The Assessment Team were encouraged by the commitment to member development including preparation of an e learning programme and further exploration for more joint working with other Councils.

### **Assessors' suggested improvement areas:**

The following are areas that Rochford District Council could work towards over the next three years. They will act as a focus to take Member development forward along with further improvement areas that the council itself will identify between now and 2017 to reflect emerging priorities.

The Assessment Teams prime recommendation for improvement is to establish a small cross party bespoke Member Development Steering Group to champion and support member development across the Council. The Team would like to see evidence of this by the end of June 2014;

- Recognising the potential changes and challenges affecting the public sector and ensuring that the member development programme is equipped to be responsive to new and returning councillors needs and requirements the Council is recommended to:
  - Develop a mentoring programme which includes some external challenge particularly at the executive member level;
  - Implement a structured framework for a Member led PDP process and seeks to achieve engagement of 70% of Members.
  - Implement a 360 degree pilot to assist with the support for individual Members;
  - Establish and support a programme for leadership development which includes external challenge;
- The Council should develop a programme which demonstrates Members and Officers working together in a joint and collaborative way to meet the corporate priorities and objectives of the Council;
- The Council should explore and implement opportunities for collaborative joint working with Essex County and District Councils;
- The Council may wish to consider an application for Charter Plus.

## **Charter Plus**

Representatives from South East Employers would be happy to discuss this in more detail at any time, and further information is available via [www.seemp.co.uk](http://www.seemp.co.uk).

### **Congratulations on achieving the Charter standard!**

The Council may continue to use the national elected member development charter logo.

We look forward to Rochford District Council supporting South East Employers in promoting the benefits of the Charter to Councils across the region.

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

**Mark Palmer**  
**Development Director South East Employers**  
**For and on behalf of the Assessment Team**  
**January 29<sup>th</sup> 2014**