

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Environmental Services Portfolio Holder 18 May 2010
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director Corporate Services / Acting Legal & Democratic Services Manager

MEMBER TRAINING – QUESTIONNAIRE & ACHIEVING MEMBER CHARTER STATUS

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - (a) Update the Portfolio Holder on the recent member training questionnaire.
 - (b) Advise the Portfolio Holder on what is required to achieve the IDeA Member Training Charter.
2. This is not a key decision, but has been brought before the Portfolio Holder to
 - Inform her of the results of the questionnaire and invite comments.
 - To consider whether the Council should strive to achieve the IDeA Member Training Charter.

Background

3. Every year Councillors are sent a Member Development Strategy questionnaire. The results of these are detailed below.
4. The budget for Seminars and Courses for 2010/11 is £5,080. All Councillors on Planning, Licensing and Employment Committee are required to have recent and relevant training in order to sit on the Committee. It is likely that after these obligatory training courses have been arranged there will be very little funds left in the existing budget for other training and development initiatives.

Considerations: Member Development Strategy Questionnaire

5. All 57 Councillors were sent a copy of the Member Development Strategy questionnaire and 16 responses were received. These are detailed in Appendix 1.
6. Councillors were invited to consider whether they required training in a variety of topics, marking each one as either:
 - Red: "I don't feel that my current levels of knowledge and understanding in this area are sufficient and feel that I would benefit from training and development".
 - Amber: "I have a basic knowledge and understanding in this area but would benefit from some further training and development in it".
 - Green: "I feel confident that my knowledge and understanding of this area is high and do not feel that I require training and development at this time".
7. The responses have been analysed and the areas where the combined red and amber scores were higher than the green have been highlighted.

Housing

8. 8 Councillors stated that they would like to further training in the Council's housing functions, although they feel that they already have a basic knowledge and understanding of it. Of those who expressed a preference 6 wanted this training to be in-house, whilst one wanted it to be e-learning.

ICT

9. 4 Councillors stated that they would benefit from basic training and 4 would like further training in IT skills. 6 out of the 9 responses stated that this should be provided in-house.

When to hold training?

10. Only three respondents wanted training to start 5pm or later, with 8 preferring 9-10am and three opting for 1-2pm. This strengthens the case for in-house training, as did the fact that only one respondent asked for training on the weekend. 11 out of 14 respondents stated that they would prefer training to be held on the same day as other meetings.

Considerations: IDeA Member Training Charter

11. The Charter for Elected Member Development aims to be a statement of the council's commitment to developing and supporting its elected councillors and offers a structured approach to member development, helping councils build their elected member capacity. The charter and the underpinning good practice guidelines were developed by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the nine Regional Employers Organisations. All of the regions now have their own charters.
12. All the regional charters hold to a common set of principles. Councils that are signed up to the charter must provide an action plan based on:
 - being fully committed to developing elected members in order to achieve the council's aims and objectives
 - adopting a member-led strategic approach to elected member development
 - having a member learning and development plan in place that clearly identifies the difference development activities will make
 - seeing that learning and development is effective in building capacity
 - addressing wider development matters to promote work-life balance and citizenship.
13. When a council can demonstrate it has achieved charter standard, an onsite assessment will be carried out by a small, trained team of elected members and or officers. Providing the council meets the standard it is then awarded charter status.
14. In the Eastern Region 31 council have achieved Charter Status, including Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and Peterborough City Council.
15. There are three challenges that need to be addressed if the IDeA Member Training Charter is to be adopted:
 - Budget: After the Seminar and Courses budget has been used to pay for the obligatory training for members of the regulatory committees, little will be left. If money is available from the budget which has been established to support the Council's actions for the coming year then consideration should be given to requesting further funding.
 - Resources: Following restructuring throughout the Council it may be difficult to allocate enough officer time towards adopting the charter

- Perceived member apathy: despite communication by e-mail and by letter only 16 Councillors returned the recent questionnaire. 27 out of 57 Councillors attended no training courses in 2009/10. This includes those provided in-house.
16. If the Member Training Charter is to be adopted then it is likely that more funds will have to be vired to the Seminar and Courses budget to make the exercise achievable. Paragraph 1.4 of Guidelines for Charter Accreditation at Appendix 2 makes it clear how important an adequate budget is to achieving the Charter. Additionally, officer time will have to be diverted from other projects if the Charter is to be adopted.
17. The Council could allocate significant resources to member training and to adopting the Charter only to generate unrealistic expectations from Councillors regarding the level of training that can be realistically delivered.

Options

18. The Portfolio Holder can
- (a) Instruct Officers to take the necessary steps to adopting the IDeA Member Training Charter.
 - (b) Note the results of the questionnaire and not attempt to adopt the Charter at this time.

Implications

19. Financial	Possible financial implications to meeting the demand generated by adopting the Charter
Legal	None
Staffing	Officer time will be required to adopt the Charter
Risk Management	None
Equal Opportunities	There would need to be equality of opportunity for all Member training courses
Climate Change	None

Consultations

20. No consultation has taken place.

Effect on Strategic Aims

21. Signing up to the Member Charter is one of the Council's actions for 2010/11 and comes under Aim A: We Are Committed To Being A Listening Council, Providing First-Class Services Accessible to All.

Recommendations

22. It is **recommended** that the Portfolio Holder:
- (a) Instruct officers to start the process towards achieving Charter Accreditation, with the caveat that, for the reasons outlined above, it may not be achievable within the 2010/11 financial year.
 - (b) Seeks further funding for member training and development in order to progress this Council action for the coming year.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Regional IDEa Charter Accreditation Guidelines – Attached at Appendix 2.

Contact Officers: Patrick Adams – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713408

Fiona McMillan – Acting Legal & Democratic Services Manager
Telephone (01954) 710327