

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Environmental Services Portfolio Holder 9 November 2010

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director Corporate Services / Acting Legal and Democratic Services Manager

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Purpose

1. To update the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder on
 - the progress being made on the Council's pursuit of Member Charter Status;
 - the Council's Member Development programme in general.
2. This is not a key decision. It is being brought to the portfolio holder's attention because signing-up to the Member Development Charter is one of the Council's actions for 2010/11 and it has been proposed that achieving Charter status should be one of the Council's actions for 2011/12.

Recommendations

3. The portfolio holder is invited to:
 - (a) Note the progress made so far this year in the field of member development.
 - (b) Agree that the process of assessing Councillor training needs should be carried out in-house.

Background

4. The Environmental Services Portfolio Holder signed-up to the Member Development Charter at her portfolio holder meeting on 27 July 2010, thus committing the Council to achieving Charter status. Meetings of the Member Development Task and Finish Group have been held on 7 September, 28 September and 21 October. The next meeting is scheduled for 30 November.
5. Group Leaders have been invited to sign-up to the Charter at the next meeting of Cabinet on Thursday 11 November.

Considerations

6. Guidelines on what is required of the Council for Charter accreditation are attached at Appendix A, with comments from the Task and Finish Group.
7. In addition to this the Task and Finish Group has overseen the following achievements:
 - Training events are now highlighted in an article in the Weekly Bulletin and a paper copy of this article is regularly sent to Councillors.
 - A new Member Development Strategy has been drafted.
 - An exit interview for retired Councillors has been drafted.
 - Training budgets for risk management, licensing, scrutiny and standards have been identified and quantified, in addition to the member training budget.
8. A formal assessment of Councillors' training requirements needs to be carried out in order to achieve Charter status. This task could be carried out by external consultants or in-house by officers.

Options

9. Fenland District Council has recently carried out a research project designed to ascertain Councillors' training needs. They identified a consultant who could assist the Council in completing a similar exercise, but would charge £70 per hour. The cost of hiring an external consultant to carry out the interviews and analyse the resulting data could not be funded out of the existing training budget. This would still be true if inventive research methods were used such as group interviews or focus groups instead of one-to-one interviews.
10. An alternative would be for the process to be managed in-house. Whilst no extra budget would need to be identified, there could be a capacity issue. It is suggested that this is addressed by minimising the interview time by ensuring that all Councillors are provided with as much relevant information as possible before the interview is carried out. This could include providing details of the interview questions or the provision of a pre-interview questionnaire. Carrying out interviews over the phone would also be more time effective.

Implications

11. Financial	Providing that the process continues to be carried out in-house, no extra costs for achieving Member Development Charter status are envisaged. £3,000 has been secured to pay SEEMP to oversee the Council's progress towards Charter status.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Risk Management	None
Equality and Diversity	The Equality and Diversity Officer has been regularly consulted on Member Development
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No
Climate Change	None

Consultations

12. None.

Effect on Strategic Aims

13. As already stated, signing-up to the Member Development Charter is one of the Council's actions for 2010/11, as part of the Aim that "we are committed to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all." It has been proposed that achieving Charter status should be one of the Council's actions for 2011/12.

Conclusions / Summary

14. The Council remains on target for achieving Charter status during 2011/12, which will ensure that Councillors are provided the training that they want within the budget available.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: None.

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