

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Environmental Services Portfolio Holder

30 June 2011

AUTHOR/S: Corporate Services / Head of Legal and Democratic Services

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT UPDATE – ACHIEVING CHARTER STATUS

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder on the progress being made to achieve Member Development Charter Status and to agree the timescale for accreditation assessment. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

2. The Environmental Services Portfolio Holder is invited to:
 - (a) agree to scheduling the Charter Status accreditation assessment in March 2012; and
 - (b) note the progress that has been made so far and raise queries regarding the challenges ahead.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. To ensure that the Council remains on target for achieving the Member Development Charter Status during 2011/12.

Background

4. The Environmental Services Portfolio Holder signed up to the Member Development Charter at her meeting on 27 July 2010, committing the Council to achieving Charter Status.
5. The Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition signed up to the objectives of the Charter at Cabinet on 11 November 2010. Senior Management Team (SMT) expressed its support for achieving Member Charter Status at its meeting on 15 December 2010.
6. To achieve Member Charter status the Council will need to show that the Council's member development programme is member-led. For this reason a multi-party Member Development Task and Finish Group was set up. The Group has met eight times since August 2010 and has made the following contributions to achieving its goal.
 - Each meeting has reviewed the accreditation guidelines for Charter Status, adding details of achievements that the Council has made and making suggestions on how the outstanding targets can best be achieved.
 - The Group's suggestions developed the Council's induction training in May 2011.
 - The Group has agreed a process for providing all Councillors with one to one interviews should they wish to discuss their training needs.
 - The Group has agreed an exit interview / questionnaire for all retiring members.

- The Group has agreed to promote attendance at fortnightly briefings and training sessions.
- The revised Member Development Strategy 2011-14 (a requirement of the Charter) was discussed at the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder meeting on 10 March 2011 and recommended to full Council.
- On 14 April 2011, Councillor Sue Ellington, Champion for Member Development, seconded by Councillor Ray Manning, commended the revised Member Development Strategy to Council. She clarified that members should undertake to help other councillors to improve their performance, and highlighted the increased attendance rates for training and development events. Members felt that having training delivered internally ensured that presentations and materials were directly relevant to the District. Council resolved to adopt the Member Development Strategy 2011-14.

Considerations

7. Progress towards the Charter was delayed temporarily due to the April 2011 secondment to another service of the officer supporting the process. Democratic Services have re-allocated officer resources accordingly, with the Democratic Services Team Leader assuming responsibility as strategic lead for member training, supported by one Democratic Services Officer and the Member Services Officer for operational responsibilities. The primary focus since the last update has necessarily been on new member induction and organisation of annual committee training events, both of which are requirements for Charter status.
8. Revised criteria for Charter status were received immediately before the 21 June 2011 Member Development Task and Finish Group meeting. Although most of these criteria are broadly similar to those towards which the Council was working, certain new requirements, such as the establishment of a Youth Council, citizenship links with local schools and higher education providers, and Council Open Days, will require additional time to organise and make it no longer feasible to seek accreditation assessment in autumn 2011.
9. The following actions are being undertaken by members and officers towards Charter accreditation:
 - (a) Introduction of a regular programme of member briefings on key topics. Briefings have been scheduled on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month and the programme is being reviewed regularly by Senior Management Team (SMT) and Executive Management Team (EMT) to ensure that it aligns closely with the forward plan;
 - (b) Exit interviews with former members and resumption of offering 1:1 interviews with current members;
 - (c) Development of personalised training programmes for members;
 - (d) Development of an annual training programme is underway and will form part of a Council protocol on the scheduling and conduct of meetings and other Council events. It is anticipated that this protocol and supporting guidance will be presented to Cabinet in November 2011. The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) already completed on the timing of meetings is also relevant to the timing of training events, demonstrating that cultural and faith commitments are considered and accounted for when meetings and trainings are scheduled, as is a requirement of the Charter;
 - (e) Implementation of the Modern Councillor on-line training resources for councillors. The Modern Councillor e-learning resources are available as part of the Council's subscription to Learning Pool, a company which provides on-line learning. An invitation to use Learning Pool has been made via the

Council's intranet in June 2011. If the Portfolio Holder supports use of Modern Councillor, a collection of generic training modules could be launched to a pilot group of councillors during summer 2011 (see **Appendix A**), possibly with custom content relating specifically to South Cambridgeshire to follow once the feedback of the pilot group has been received and the resources are ready to be offered to all members. It is intended that the on-line system be fully operational by 31 March 2012. If the Portfolio Holder wishes to proceed, officers will seek member volunteers to test the system during the summer of 2011. Subject to the pilot group's feedback, the implementation date could be brought forward;

- (f) Holding a Council 'Open Day' Marketplace event to promote the Council's services both internally and externally. Democratic Services is liaising with Customer Services about the organisation of a two-day event on Friday 9 October 2011 (last day of Customer Services Week) and Monday 11 October 2011 (first day of Local Democracy Week);
- (g) Establishment of a Youth Council in partnership with Village Colleges. Ideally this project would be launched during Local Democracy Week (11-15 October 2011);
- (h) Review of Member Induction in November 2011 once the newest councillors have had six months to reflect on their initial introduction to being councillors;
- (i) Submission of criteria for the Council's candidacy for the Municipal Journal's Councillor Development Achievement of the Year Award in January 2012;
- (j) Member-led review of the 'New Member Induction Pack' and the 'Member Toolkit' to create a 'Prospective Member Guidance Pack'. It is anticipated that Democratic Services will organise an event for prospective councillors in February or March 2012, well in advance of the closing date for nominations. Other authorities working to this timescale have reported that it has been more successful at attracting attendees than similar events scheduled at the start of the election season.

Options

- 10. To proceed according to the original timescale and seek accreditation assessment in autumn 2011. This would prove a challenging timescale, as much of the work towards the new Charter criteria would still be in its early stages, particularly the Youth Council.
- 11. To agree to schedule the accreditation assessment in March 2012. This would enable more time to allow the above actions to be more fully realised, and for a review of Customer Services Week and Local Democracy Week, and of the prospective member event, to be undertaken with recommendations for future events.

Implications

12. Financial	The majority of work is being undertaken in-house and access to the Modern Councillor on-line learning modules is part of the Council's existing subscription to Learning Pool. There could be scope to bring in revenue if training opportunities are offered to members of neighbouring authorities, including parish councils and the County Council, where appropriate.
Legal	None specific.
Staffing	Achieving Charter Status will involve officer time. The officers involved are the Democratic Services Team Leader, one Democratic Services Officer and the Member Services Officer.
Risk Management	None specific.

Equality and Diversity	The Council's Equality and Diversity Officer has been contacted with regard to ensuring that member training is accessible for all Councillors.
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No An EQIA relating specifically is not considered to be necessary, but as described earlier in the report, the EQIA on the timing of meetings is applicable to the timing of training and development events.
Climate Change	Introduction of e-learning opportunities will reduce the need for car journeys to attend training events.

Consultations

13. Consultation has begun with other authorities, such as Fenland District Council, which have already achieved Member Development Charter Status (using the previous criteria) and, via the Association of Democratic Services Officers, with other authorities working towards accreditation under the new criteria. Detailed responses have not yet been received.
14. The Member Development Task and Finish Group were consulted on the Member Development Strategy and made suggestions and amendments prior to its presentation to Council in April 2011.
15. Member evaluation of the training that the Council provides is also a requisite of the Member Development Charter. This post-training information is shared with the officer responsible for organising the training and used to inform future training programmes.

Consultation with Children and Young People

16. None yet, but this will be undertaken as part of the requirements to establish a Youth Council and to develop citizenship links with local schools and higher education providers.

Effect on Strategic Aims

17. Achieving the Member Development Charter will assist the Council in achieving Aim A (iv) "achieving improved customer satisfaction with our services".

Conclusions / Summary

18. Achieving Member Development Charter Status by the end of March 2012 is a realistic target and allows additional time to meet the revised criteria.

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

Minutes and agendas of the Member Development Task and Finish Group.

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