

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Environmental Services Portfolio Holder 15 November 2011

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

MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Purpose

1. To inform the Portfolio Holder of the progress made regarding the achievement of Charter Status for Elected Member Development and to seek agreement to bring forward the assessment date. This is not a key decision, although it does affect all councillors, and it has been in the Forward Plan since March 2011.

Recommendation

2. That the Portfolio Holder comment on the progress towards achievement of the Member Charter and agree to bring forward the date of the assessment visit from 31 March 2012 to 24 January 2012.

Reasons for Recommendation

3. Following a review of the Council's self-assessment for Charter status by South East Employers, who will be conducting the formal review, the Council was advised that it was ahead of schedule for meeting all the criteria and was invited to bring its assessment visit forward from March 2012 to October 2011. It is recommended that the visit be scheduled on 24 January 2012 due to the number of member development events during the autumn of 2011 which will form part of the Council's evidence base for Charter Status.

Background

4. In August 2010 the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder, as Member Development Champion, established a cross-party Member Development Task and Finish Group to steer both the Council's Charter Status work and to manage a more structured approach to member training and development.
5. On 10 November 2010 the Leader, Major Opposition Group Leader and Chief Executive signed a commitment to achieve Quality Charter Status for Elected Member Development within the next three years. This commitment built on the actions set out in the Council's existing Member Development Strategy 2008-2011, which was refreshed for 2011-2014 and adopted by Council in April 2011.
6. On 30 June 2011 the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder agreed that the assessment visit by South East Employers, the organisation which would award the Charter, be scheduled for March 2012.

Considerations

7. The following actions have been 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, but overall the programme is being driven by member demand, with a number of briefings being held at members' specific requests for more information about a particular topic. Members are also beginning to take an active part in delivery of briefings;

- (b) Exit interviews with former members and offering 1:1 interviews with current members to determine training and development needs, leading to the development of personalised training programmes for members;
- (c) Development of an annual training programme is underway and will be presented to Cabinet in February 2012 once the majority of 2012/13 meetings have been scheduled to align training opportunities with meeting dates to minimise the number of car journeys. 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;
- (d) Implementation of the Modern Councillor on-line training resources for councillors has been delayed temporarily following staffing changes, but will be resumed as soon as Democratic Services have been fully trained to use the system. Modern Councillor offers a number of generic self-study training modules on issues specific to councillors, and bespoke modules can be developed in-house to provide on-line training for issues specific to South Cambridgeshire;
- (e) Review of Member Induction in November 2011 once the newest councillors have had six months to reflect on their initial introduction to being councillors. Their feedback will help the Member Development Task and Finish Group develop the 2012 induction programme and the materials in the New Member Induction Pack;
- (f) Creation of a 'Be a Councillor Guidance Pack' which was handed out to prospective councillors at the Open Day and is also available for download from the Council's website. An event for prospective councillors will be held on the evening of 13 February 2012, well in advance of the closing date for nominations;
- (g) Establishment by South Cambridgeshire of the Cambridgeshire Member Development Network to bring together the lead members and officers for member development from across the county using the Local Government Association's Communities of Practice website. Membership now includes Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and Peterborough City Council. Network authorities are sharing training and development plans and it is proposed that, where appropriate, training and development invitations be extended to members and officers of network authorities to maximise the use of training budgets;
- (h) Quarterly development update leaflets issued to all councillors with a calendar of forthcoming events, feedback for recent events, details of how to suggest new topics, and any other progress towards Charter Status;
- (i) Virtual attendance at conferences through 'webinars';
- (j) Intranet-based member library of training and development materials from recent events, and other items of interest, such as the Political Mentoring Toolkit recently launched by City University London;
- (k) More publicity of forthcoming events, including a sign-up sheet in the Members' Lounge. Members who have signed up to attend will receive a confirmation e-mail from Democratic Services;
- (l) Scrutiny of member development on 3 November 2011; and
- (m) A Member Development blog on the intranet where members can discuss training, make suggestions for future events.

8. Other events held since the previous update:
- (a) Decision by Cabinet on 8 September 2011 to establish a Youth Council following on from actions in the Young People's Plan and one of the criteria of the Member Charter;
 - (b) The first Council Open Day on 7 October 2011 as part of Customer Services Week; and
 - (c) An open day with young people was held on 13 October 2011 as part of Local Democracy Week, which included a number of members answering questions from the attendees and presenting an overview of what the Council, and what a councillor, does.
9. Member involvement in the preparation, planning and delivery of such projects is a requirement of Charter Status as the events provide opportunities for members to develop their constituency role, working with different age groups and promoting the role of councillor as community champion.
10. The Council has an annual performance indicator of the percentage of councillors who have attended at least one training session (SF715), with an end-of-year target of 85%. Attendance is monitored by Democratic Services and training attendance by each councillor since 2003 has been published on the Council's website (www.scambs.gov.uk/councillors). Thirty-nine training events have been held since the May and forty-nine of fifty-seven councillors (86%) have attended at least one session. It is acknowledged that there is no one time which is suitable for all members to attend training and it is hoped that the launch of on-line training and invitations to attend events held by other authorities will bring this total closer to 100%.

Implications

11. 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. Through the Cambridgeshire Member Development Network, more opportunities for training and development will become available than the Council's annual member training budget of £5,080 would alone have funded.
Legal	None specific.
Staffing	Achieving Charter Status involves officer time. The officers involved are the Democratic Services Team Leader, one Democratic Services Officer and the Member Services Officer, as well as any officers delivering briefings.
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, and scheduling of training events on days when other meetings are scheduled will reduce the number of car journeys.

Consultations

12. Consultation has been undertaken with other authorities 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. The Cambridgeshire Member Development Network includes one authority (Huntingdonshire) which has recently achieved Charter Status, with Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council both recently having committed to achieving it within the next few years, so South Cambridgeshire is well-placed to advise and be advised on the process.
13. 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.
14. Member evaluation of the training that the Council provides is also a requisite of the Member Development Charter. This post-training information after every event is shared with the trainer and used to inform future programmes.

Consultation with Children and Young People

15. 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. Members will also be involved in training and induction of youth councillors and in speaking with young people about local democracy and answering their questions about the Council and its role.

Effect on Strategic Aims

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

Conclusions / Summary

17. The commitment shown by members and officers to achieving Charter Status means that the date of the assessment visit can be brought forward.

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

Member Development Strategy 2011-2014
Charter Status Self-Assessment

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