



Cabinet

Item
10(ii)

13 March 2024

Report of

Democratic Services Manager

Author

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Title

Amendment to Councillor Development Policy: Leadership Academy

Wards affected

'Not applicable'

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report proposes a revision to the Councillor Development Policy to clarify the arrangements for the nomination for Councillors to attend the LGA's Leadership Academy.

2. Recommended Decision

2.1 To amend the Councillor Development Policy as set out at paragraph 5.7.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

3.1 The aim of the amendment to the policy is to make the process for the nomination for Councillors for the funded place at Leadership Academy more equitable.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Not to amend the Councillor Development Policy.

5. Background Information

5.1 Leadership Academy is the LGA's flagship Leadership Development programme. It is a modular leadership development programme with three, two-day residential modules which take place over a three month period.

Module 1: Personal Leadership. This module explores how councillors can develop, maintain and use relationships – both internal and external – to provide effective leadership at the political, organisational and wider community levels.

Module 2: Political Leadership. This module will develop councillors' ability to lead and manage complex change to improve effectiveness and efficiency and to achieve better outcomes for the community.

Module 3: Leadership of place. The focus is on helping councillors to communicate with and provide leadership to their communities and within partnerships to achieve growth and prosperity.

All modules are underpinned by the following principles.

- Grounded in the challenges and opportunities provided by the current local government context.
- Draw on leading edge thinking.
- Sharing of best practice.
- Focus and building on participants' own experiences and challenges.
- Provide time for reflection and self-evaluation.
- Encourage bold and ambitious leadership.

5.2 It is aimed at those in Leadership positions within local authorities, which is defined as the following positions:-

- Council Leaders and Executive Mayors
- Deputy Leaders
- Group Leaders
- Portfolio Holders
- Shadow Portfolio Holders
- Scrutiny Chairs

5.3 The LGA list the benefits of attending as follows:

- Understand your own leadership style and improve your leadership capabilities.
- Understand and implement effective leadership strategies for the current environment.
- Work on your own specific challenges relevant to your Council.
- Develop a leadership toolbox of techniques and strategies for different situations.
- Working with peers from other parties and councils. Feedback we have received from attendees is that this is particularly valuable and attendees gain a valuable network of peers.
- Talking the learning back to Council.
- Registered member of the Institute of Leadership for 1 year with access to their resources.

The Council's commitment to Leadership academy is also useful in terms of securing Member Charter Status in that it demonstrates its commitment to developing those who hold senior positions within the Council.

5.4 A place at Leadership Academy cost a Local Authority £1000 for the first place its books each municipal year. Subsequent places costs £1250. This includes accommodation costs so the only additional costs are travel costs.

5.5 The Council's Councillor Development Policy states that:

The Council is committed to the development of the leadership of the Council and all members of the Cabinet and Group Leaders are encouraged to attend the LGA's Leadership Academy. The Council will fund one place, at Leadership Academy each year from the core councillor training budget. The place will be allocated by the Leader of the Council.

5.6 At its meeting in November the Member Development Group considered the arrangements around the Council's commitment to Leadership Academy. The full note of the Group's consideration is attached at Appendix 1.

5.7 The Group recognised the continued value of Leadership Academy but considered that there should be an opportunity for a wider role for the political groups in the process for nominations. It was proposed that whilst the final decision should rest with the Leader of the Council, there should be an opportunity for the political groups to make nominations for the leader to consider. It is therefore recommended that the relevant part of the Councillor Development Policy be amended to read as follows:-

The Council is committed to the development of the leadership of the Council and all members of the Cabinet and Group Leaders are encouraged to attend the LGA's Leadership Academy. The Council will fund one place at Leadership Academy each year from the core councillor training budget. Initial nominations for a place at Leadership Academy will be made by the Council's Political Group Leaders from within their Groups, and the final decision on the allocation of the place will be made by the Leader of the Council.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 An EQIA for the councillor development policy has been prepared and can be accessed via the link below.

<http://www.colchester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=2290&p=0>

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 Member development supports all the Strategic Plan priorities by promoting the skills and knowledge members need in order to fulfil their roles effectively.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no direct financial implications. The costs of the place at Leadership Academy would be met from the Councillor Development Budget. The proposal in the report is designed to improve the nomination process rather increase the number of attendees.

9. Standard References

9.1 There are no particular references to consultation or publicity considerations or community safety; health and safety, environmental sustainability or risk management implications.

Appendix 1

Extract from the notes of the Member Development Group meeting 15 November 2023

2. Leadership Academy

The Group considered a report providing information about the Local Government Association's (LGA) Leadership Academy and the Council's policy in relation to attendance at Leadership Academy.

Richard Clifford, Democratic Services Manager, attended the meeting to present the report, which was brought before the Group following discussions which had taken place at its previous meeting concerning the financing of attendance at Leadership Academy. The Academy was intended to be a flagship leadership academy for Councillors, and although it had historically been a residential course, remote attendance options had been made available following the Coronavirus pandemic. The Academy consisted of 3 modules which dealt with personal leadership, political leadership and leadership of place, and each as dealt with over the course of a weekend. The offering was aimed mainly at Council Leaders, members of Cabinet, Committee Chairs and Shadow Portfolio Holders. Members who attended described the main benefits being around building a leadership style and building networks among peers to use as a sounding board and to draw on experience from other local authorities.

The Council's Development Policy stated that 1 place a year on the Academy would be funded by the Council from the Member Development budget, at the cost of £1,000 for the first attendee with subsequent attendees costing £1,250 each. It was noted that it had been several years since anyone from the Council had attended, and although the Leader was always asked whether they wished to nominate someone, this had not tended to happen in recent years, and although the Leader had been asked to nominate someone this year, this had not happened. There did not appear to be a clear reason for this, however, it was suggested that to some degree the Coronavirus pandemic may have triggered more of a shift away from external training.

At the previous meeting, there had been some discussion around the way in which candidates were nominated to attend, and this may have some bearing on the lack of attendance, as responsibility for nominating fell solely on the Leader. It may have been the case that had been interested in attending, but were not invited to do so, and the views of the Group were invited on this point; was the Academy still worth pursuing, and how did it feel nominations should be sought? Not enough money was left in the Member Development budget this year to send more than one Councillor, although a single place could be funded.

In discussion, the Group thought that there would be interest in attending the Academy, but that the cost of this was quite significant. In spite of this, it was felt that there was an obligation to ensure that there was opportunity for learning and training as Councillors had a variety of skills and backgrounds, and were being asked to comment and lead in areas in which they may not be expert. This training was therefore considered to be invaluable and the cost was justified by this. It was suggested that the nomination of only a single attendee was quite limiting, and created a pressure to ensure that the right Councillor was selected. All Councillors deserved to have access to the Academy, was there a possibility that online or more local training options were available? The potential costs of travel to the Academy were noted, and the Democratic Services Manager confirmed to the Group that all travel and other expenses associated with attendance would be met by the Council.

When considering the nomination process, the Group wondered how this could be made more equitable. It was noted that there was a high turnover in Cabinet members at the Council, and

new Members would certainly benefit from the support offered by the Academy. Although there was a trend to identify new Councillors for training of this nature, the Group noted that even more experienced Councillors could benefit from this form of development. It was considered that external training was potentially of more benefit than internal training for this purpose, as a fresher perspective could be provided.

The Democratic Services Manager reiterated that a place on the Academy was offered as the result of a nomination from the Leader, however, there was the potential to frame some additional guidance to assist with this. Canvassing the Political Groups at the Council could provide an opportunity for interest to be expressed from within the Groups, and an such interest referred on by the Group Leaders. Any change in the Council's Policy would need to be approved by Cabinet or Council. The Group felt strongly that the nomination process should be the subject of transparent discussion within the Political Groups, who would then nominate potential attendees for approval by the Leader.

It was considered that the policy should be updated and presented to Cabinet with the suggestion that initial nominations were made by Political Group Leaders with the final recommendation being made by the Leader of the Council.

In response to questioning from the Group, the Democratic Services Manager explained that the Policy did not provide for any sort of feedback to be provided explaining the reasoning for nominations made by the Leader. The training was, however, aimed at specific groups of Councillors; those either in, or potentially in, leadership positions and any nomination should fit within these criteria. The Leadership Academy was run by the LGA who were sector leaders and well abreast of relevant developments, theories, and issues facing local government. It would be very difficult to draw up a leadership program within the Council, or locally, which would deliver content of this quality. The Group suggested that in the event of more than one recommendation from the Group Leaders, transparency of the reasoning behind the final nomination would be helpful, and it was considered that transparency at every level of Council decision making was important. Councillors who were nominated but not selected should receive some feedback on the reasons they were not selected.

RESOLVED that:

- the Council's Councillor Development Policy be amended to state that initial nominations for a place on the LGA Leadership Academy would be made by the Council's Political Group Leaders, with the final decision on attendance at the Academy being taken by the Leader of the Council.
- The amended Councillor Development Policy be presented to Cabinet for approval.