

November 2022

Report of Strategic Director
Title Member Champions
Wards affected All

Author Rory Doyle
7855

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Policy Panel are asked to consider the merits of introducing new roles for Members to act as Champions.
- 1.2 Member Champions are elected members who in addition to their other council responsibilities make sure a specific issue, subject, or group that they are championing is taken into account when council policy is being developed and decisions are made.
- 1.3 The proposal is that a small number of Members could act as 'Champions' for specified subject areas or groups commencing in the next municipal year. In doing so champions may advocate or be spokesperson for a specific area of the Council's business. The main responsibility of each Champion will be to encourage communication and positive action over the subject/group they represent.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 To debate the merits of creating Champion roles to support the business of the City Council.
- 2.2 Recommend areas of Council business that would benefit from adopting a Member Champion approach where it has merit.
- 2.3 To consider and make recommendations on the scope of a Member Champion role.
- 2.4 To consider and make recommendations on a protocol for Member Champions.
- 2.5 To consider the role Policy Panel may have in championing, scrutinising, or advocating on areas of key Council business with or without self-standing Champions as set out in this paper.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 The recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback report noted It was clear *“that councillors across the borough bring passion, enthusiasm, drive and a real a love for Colchester. This needs to be harnessed better to ensure that all the authority’s councillors are aware of, engaged in and supportive of the Council’s future plans”*.
- 3.2 Member champions are Members who act as an advocate or spokesperson for a specific area of the Council’s business. The main responsibility of a Member Champion is to encourage communication and positive action over the issue they represent.
- 3.3 In reviewing the role of champions operating in other local authorities it is common for the programme of activities undertaken by the Champion to add weight and support to the delivery of key Council priorities. Often roles act to provide a voice for traditionally underrepresented groups, or issues which need to be kept at the forefront of council business where they may not otherwise be the responsibility of any individual or committee or where the matters are crosscutting.
- 3.4 A draft Member Champions Protocol is set out in appendix 1. This protocol aims to clearly define the role of a Member Champion and provide guidance on the proposed scope and remit. The protocol also sets out the level of support Member Champions might expect to receive in addition to ways of working with Portfolio Holders, Officers, and Committee/Panels etc. as well as other stakeholders internally and externally.
- 3.5 Appendix 2 outlines a draft Member Champion role description in more detail but in summary a Member Champion may:
- Raise the profile and demonstrate the Council's commitment to an issue
 - Ensure the area in scope is considered when developing policy or making decisions
 - Ask questions about performance and resourcing for the area
 - Make the authority aware of good practice.
 - Promote effective communication and positive working relationships both within the Council and amongst partners, stakeholders and community groups
 - Provide positive support and constructive challenge, to Cabinet, PFH and Officers in driving forward the Council's agenda on an issue
 - Report action to the Council
- 3.6 It is proposed that should the need for Member Champions be agreed that they will be appointed at the discretion of the Leader of the Council, following discussion with Portfolio Holders, Group Leaders and then be subject to ratification by Full Council. Where more than one Member Champion is appointed, consideration shall be given to how they might work as a collective to support the work of the Council and the needs of residents alongside the work programmes of existing committees such as the Policy Panel.
- 3.7 A topic for which a Member Champion is appointed should be:
- An agreed and sustainable priority for the Council

- A matter or area that can be defined in terms of its remit, i.e., not open-ended
- A matter that does not otherwise sit within the clear remit of a Portfolio Holder or a single Committee/Panel

3.8 Best practice dictates that Member Champions will have a passion for the subject matter within scope of their role and have relevant knowledge and subject matter expertise alongside broader key skills as set out below:

- The ability to foster cross-party co-operation and to engage with relevant outside groups and Officers
- Excellent communication skills
- Good presentation and public speaking skills
- Good media skills.

3.9 Examples of Member Champion roles in other local authorities include:

- Armed Forces and Veterans
- Equality and Diversity
- Older People
- Young People
- Climate Change
- Voluntary and Third Sector
- Mental Health

3.10 As set out in 3.6 when considering the merits of a Member Champion approach, consideration ought to be given to the future role and work programme of the Policy Panel, whether the Panel may act as a forum of platform for matters supported by Champions or alternatively whether the Panel and its members could fulfil the function to some extent of championing key areas of Council business.

4 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

4.1 The role of Member Champions if agreed will act to promote Equality, Diversity and Human Rights and has the potential to be a voice for underrepresented groups.

5 Strategic Plan References

5.1 The role of a Member Champion will be clearly defined and aligned to the Council's Strategic Plan.

6 Consultation

6.1 There are no consultation considerations currently as a result of this report.

7 Publicity Considerations

7.1 Publicity of the role of Member Champions will be undertaken as required subject to recommendations being made otherwise there are no publicity considerations at this time.

8 Financial implications

- 8.1 Any recommendation to implement Member Champions roles will need to work within existing budgets.

9 Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 There are no health, wellbeing and community safety implication considerations at this time as a result of this report.

10 Health and Safety Implications

- 10.1 There are no health and safety implications currently as a result of this report.

11 Risk Management Implications

- 11.1 There are no risk implications as a result of this report.

12 Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 12.1 There are no environmental and sustainability implications as a result of these recommendations.

Appendix 1

Colchester City Council Member Champions Protocol (DRAFT)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Member champions are Members who act as an advocate or spokesperson for a specific area of the Council's business. The main responsibility of each Member Champion is to encourage communication and positive action over the issue they represent.

2.0 Appointment of Member Champions

- 2.1 The appointment of Member Champions will be at the discretion of the Leader of the Council, following discussion with Portfolio Holders, Group Leaders and then be subject to ratification by Full Council.
- 2.2 Each political group will be made aware of proposals to appoint Member Champions and given the opportunity to submit nominations.
- 2.3 Member Champions will not be Members of the Council's Cabinet.
- 2.4 There is no legal requirement to apply the political balance rules to the appointment. As such appointments will be made based on skills, knowledge and suitability for the role.
- 2.5 Any Member Champion may resign from office by giving written notice to their Group Leader, the Leader of the Council, and the Monitoring Officer.

3.0 Role of Member Champions

- 3.1 All Member Champions will have a role description setting out their respective roles.
- 3.2 A draft generic role description is set out in Appendix 2.
- 3.3 By appointing a Member as a Champion, the Council is empowering that Member to act in that capacity. It follows, therefore, that the Council should put in place such arrangements as it thinks appropriate to support the Champion in that capacity.

4.0 Scope of the Member Champion Role

- 4.1 The role is set in the context of the specific interest or theme. The following parameters apply to the role:
- All Member Champions must act reasonably in the role.
 - All Member Champions must recognise and work effectively within the political management and working arrangements agreed by the Council.
- 4.2 A topic for which a Member Champion is appointed should be:
- An agreed and sustainable priority for the Council
 - A matter or area that can be defined in terms of its remit, i.e. not open-ended
 - A matter that does not otherwise sit within the clear remit of a Portfolio Holder or a single Committee/Panel
- 4.3 A Member Champion:
- Is effectively given authority by the Council to take all reasonable actions judged by the Member as being necessary to perform the role of Champion

- Cannot commit the Council in any way that is contrary to established policy, budget and practice, but may confirm a Council position, as stated in published policy.
- Cannot make decisions that bind the Council.
- Is a recognised media contact on matters relating to the interest being championed but is expected to follow the Council's Media Protocol and keep the Communications Team plus relevant Portfolio Holder and/or Leader informed of such contact.
- Is entitled to have access to information held by the Council relating to the interest being championed
- The Champion's programme of activities should reflect the Council's overall priorities as set out in the Strategic Plan.

5.0 Support for Member Champions in their role

- 5.1 Member Champions play an important role in promoting their area of interest on behalf of the Council. In recognition of the importance of the respective roles of Member Champions, officer support will be provided at a senior level.
- 5.2 Each Member Champion will be advised by an appropriate senior lead Officer, who will meet with the relevant Member Champion as required to discuss action plans, current activities, national developments or any other matters relating to the interest being championed.
- 5.3 Officers will give reasonable support to the Member Champion, including the provision of Council information, government communications and national publications within their remit.
- 5.4 Taking all the above into account, the Council will:
 - Take steps to promote understanding within the Council of the role of a Member Champion and describe how it relates to other member level functions.
 - Promote similar understanding among its working partners, external bodies and the local community.
 - Arrange for Member Champions to be supported by the Democratic Services Team. This support will be for the functionality of the role – signposting and assistance with administration and research, where appropriate - not the professional input.
 - Ensure that Lead Officer(s) and relevant Teams/Services relating to each championed interest are aware of the Champion roles that affect them and the rights of Champions to access/discuss information about the service.
 - Require each Member Champion to report annually about their programme of activity and how they have contributed to the achievement of the Council's overall priorities
 - Member Champions are able to report any issues arising to relevant Panels or Committees, as and when appropriate and following discussion with the relevant Portfolio Holder, Chairperson and Lead Officer
 - Consider appropriate training and development opportunities for Member Champions.

6.0 Internal Working Relationships

- 6.1 The Member Champion will:
 - Liaise regularly with Portfolio Holders whose portfolios are relevant to the role (for some generic interests this will be all or many of them).
 - Monitor the notice of key decisions and seek information from the relevant Officers and Portfolio Holders about forthcoming business and exert influence on behalf of the interest.

- Monitor forward plans for all Committees and seek information and offer views on relevant review subjects and exert influence on behalf of the interest.
- Take advice from the relevant lead professional Officer(s).
- Seek to place appropriate items on relevant Council meeting agendas, seeking guidance from Democratic Services where appropriate.
- Keep other councillors up to date with activities within the interest.
- Generally promote the interest.

6.2 Portfolio Holders will:

- Acknowledge the right of Member Champions to be consulted on matters relating to their interest.
- Take full account of any views offered by Member Champions prior to any decision (irrespective of whether it is a delegated Portfolio Holder decision or Cabinet decision) being taken on matters within their area of interest (and demonstrate this in the record of the decision)
- Ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with Champions in the formulation of policy and other matters and that any views are contained in the information provided to decision makers.
- Consider inviting the relevant Champion to represent the Council at any relevant conference/seminar on the subject matter of the interest on the basis that the Champion will report back to the Cabinet member.

6.3 Committee and Panel members will:

- Acknowledge the right of Champions to be consulted and to participate in discussion on matters relating to their interest.
- Ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with Champions in the formulation of policy and in service review activity.
- Ensure Champions are specifically invited to be contributors to any reviews that have a direct bearing on the interest (recognising the right of a Champion to attend as an observer at any such session).
- Ensure that opportunity is provided for Member Champions to contribute to, or comment on, the work programme of the Policy Panel and other Committees.

6.4 Officers will:

- Ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with relevant Member Champion(s) where the issue clearly relates to the interest.
- Co-operate fully with Member Champions in enabling them to perform their functions and to discuss directly with Member Champions and Portfolio Holder(s) where proposed actions might prejudice Council or other priorities.

7.0 External Working Arrangements

7.1 The Member Champion:

- Will need to acknowledge that there is no statutory authority for the Member Champion role.
- Will need to recognise that the Council does have some legal powers with regard to the scrutiny of external bodies and other working relationships with outside bodies arising from legal provisions.
- Will monitor and work closely with partner bodies in the field of the interest being championed.
- May be the Council's representative on certain relevant external bodies.
- Will identify the most relevant community bodies whose work is associated with the interest and foster good working relationships with those groups.

- Will take steps to promote within the wider community the specific issues on which the Member Champion is to focus and to provide opportunities for local engagement – involving the relevant Assistant Director and Portfolio Holder, as appropriate.

8.0 Declaration of Interests

- 8.1 Member Champions are reminded to ensure any interests they may have are declared at all appropriate points

Appendix 2

Member Champion Role Description (Draft)

The following examples may be appropriate to include in a Member Champion role description:

1. To champion the adopted policy of this Council for the relevant theme;
2. To promote their area of interest both within and outside the Council;
3. To contribute to the review and development of policies pertaining to the area of interest;
4. To act as a critical friend to challenge and question the Council, the Leader and Portfolio Holders on issues affecting their area or responsibility;
5. To attend meetings of the Council, its Committees and the Executive and speak on issues (when permitted by the Chair of the meeting) relevant to their area;
6. To act as a catalyst for change and improvement in service delivery;
7. To monitor Forward Plans and seek information from the Leader, Portfolio Holders and relevant officers about forthcoming business and exert influence on behalf of the interest;
8. To monitor the work programme, work plans and activity of the Council's Committees and Panel and seek information, and offer views on relevant review subjects and exert influence on behalf of the interest;
9. To seek to place appropriate items on any Member Working Group agendas (where an appropriate topic/project is being considered);
10. To keep other councillors up-to-date with activities relevant to the area of interest;
11. To network with Member Champions from other local authorities with the same interest to keep up-to-date with current developments;
12. To provide positive support, and on occasions, constructive challenge to Members and officers in driving forward the Council's agenda on relevant issues; and
13. To act as the Council's representative on relevant external bodies where Council representation is required or sought.