

## Appendix 2

### Councillor Development Charter

#### Assessor's Comments

##### Criteria 1: There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support

##### Assessor's comments

There is an impressive commitment and passion for member development throughout Colchester Borough Council (CBC), evident on the assessment day from both councillors and officers. The member development programme benefits from experienced and dedicated officer support, which is highly valued and trusted by councillors. There is a sustainable budget for member development and a strong commitment from the council's leadership, including its new Chief Executive, to maintaining and improving the development programme.

Officers and councillors alike adapted quickly during the Covid-19 pandemic, learning new skills which enabled them to continue to deliver CBC's member development activities virtually. Online learning has increased the accessibility of the councillor development programme for many members (particularly those with work or caring commitments) and attendance levels at training events has risen to 84%. Many councillors felt that virtual learning had enabled the programme to become more flexible and responsive to their needs.

It was recognised that, with public health restrictions now lifted, the council will need to find the balance between remote and in-person training sessions to meet different councillor learning styles. For example, some witnesses on the assessment day spoke of missing the informal networking opportunities that in-person learning provides, whilst others were keen to maintain the virtual learning offer.

Colchester is a diverse area, however this diversity is not fully reflected in the councillor cohort. This was recognised as an issue by a number of councillors we spoke to on the assessment day, with some political groups already considering how they can attract a wider variety of candidates through their selection processes. It is recommended that the council supports political groups in promoting the role of councillors through an enhanced Be a Councillor programme. The council should also look to put in place a package to support people in the councillor role including initiatives such as a Carers allowance, Parental Leave Policy etc.

Many members we spoke to expressed concern regarding the nature of political discourse in Colchester and how this could deter potential candidates from standing as councillors. The assessment team recommends that the Member Development Group (MDG) leads a short task group looking at behaviours and values of members and develops some support/guidance to promote them - particularly around the use of social media.

## **Criteria 2: The Council has a strategic approach to councillor development**

### **Assessor's comments**

CBC has an experienced and engaged Member Development Group (MDG), which has led on the development of a Member Development Strategy which links with the strategic objectives of the council. The MDG are clearly champions for the benefits of member development and committed to working constructively with officers to continuously improve the councillor development offer.

There has been a good response to the council's Training Needs Analysis for councillors, with 37 members providing a response. There was an appetite from witnesses to further building on the TNA's and offering 1-1 individual development conversations with councillors. These could be led by the officer team in Democratic Services and used to produce individual Personal Development Plans for members. Democratic Services are planning on offering a session on their support offer immediately post elections. It would be useful to introduce the enhanced 1-1 and Personal Development Plan process at this time, in order to secure early buy-in.

CBC has committed to sending one councillor per year to participate in the LGA Leadership Academy. It was felt by many witnesses that there was an opportunity to make further use of LGA training courses, especially their new virtual opportunities and resources. This would help enhance CBC's leadership development programme for members and support effective succession planning.

## **Criteria 3: Learning and development is effective in building capacity**

### **Assessor's comments**

CBC has improved its approach to evaluating member development since the last Charter assessment. Evaluation surveys have a good response rate, are reported back to MDG and improvements made as a result. Officers are keen to 're-launch and re-brand'

the member development offer at CBC, to reflect the improvements made, the professionalism of what is on offer and greater inclusion of relevant LGA materials.

CBC works constructively with partners and the pandemic has highlighted the key role that councillors can play as community leaders. Relationships with partners can be further developed through including them in member activities and training, for example by asking partners to lead member development sessions or sit as co-optees on scrutiny reviews. The assessment team recommends that CBC invites partners to lead on sessions within its induction programme post elections, to help foster good relationships between new councillors and partners at the earliest opportunity.

### **Continuous Improvement**

- To take forward a more focused approach to promoting the role of councillor in order to increase diversity. Utilise LGA Be A Councillor resources and support, look at working with political groups to hold events and have a package to support people in the councillor role including initiatives such as a Carers allowance, Parental Leave Policy etc.
- To relaunch, rebadge and have a brand for member development, to raise its profile and to include access to the LGA virtual learning modules.
- Look at the values and behaviours of councillors and how it can support more effective collaborative working between councillors, including using social media effectively.
- To take forward more joint development between Executive Management Team and Cabinet.
- Further develop the role of strategic partners in member development delivery and participation at relevant development events and activities. Include partner involvement in the induction programme following the May 2022 elections.
- To develop an approach to Personal Development Plans for Councillor's through conversations via MS Teams to support individual development.
- Ensure continued commitment to leadership development to support effective councillor succession planning.
- Widen councillor access to LGA leadership resources, particularly the virtual resources.

- To commit and take forward Charter Plus commitment and accreditation.

### **Special Mention**

- Top political and managerial commitment. High level support from leader as the chair of Member Development Group. Key officer support from new Chief Executive and Democratic Services Officers.
- Member Development Group is high profile and strategic in focus.
- Newly revised Councillor Development Policy and strategy led by Member Development Group that supports the priorities outlined in the Better Colchester Strategic Plan.
- Promotion of the role of councillor via website and active role in schools through Councillor Multi Schools Resources.
- Member development programme has high level of participation - 84% via MS Teams. Sessions recorded for future use and resource. Member Development programme is responsive to councillor needs e.g. recent events on modern slavery.
- Mandatory training modules are in place around planning/licensing, safeguarding and GDPR.
- Budget for member development is sustainable £8k.
- Training Needs Analysis carried out in January 2021. High response of 37 councillors and the report to the Member Development Group identified clear priorities and links to the Better Colchester Strategic Plan.
- New role profiles in place.
- Commitment to leadership development, one councillor per year provided place on LGA Leadership Academy.
- Executive Management Team and Cabinet have regular dialogue. Senior Management team regularly attend councillor development sessions.
- Good response to member development evaluation surveys.

- Shared learning opportunities with Parish and Town councils.
- Looking to have a specific session on member development post May 2022 elections to raise the profile of the programme and to outline the support the Council can provide to new members.

**Assessor's comments**

Thank you to members and officers at the council for making the assessment team feel so 'virtually' welcome. Well done! The Council can continue to use the Charter logo and an interim light touch discussion to be scheduled around October 2023.  
Congratulations on your success

**Recommendation from the verification team**

Colchester Borough Council continues to achieve the Charter Standard. A review of progress against the assessment team's recommendations for continuous improvement will take place in approximately 18 months.