

Report of	Assistant Director of Corporate and Improvement Services	Author	Richard Clifford ☎ 507832
Title	Member Development Group Annual Report 2019-20 and Renewal of Member Charter Status		
Wards affected	'Not applicable'		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of the Member Development Group is to provide a forum where members can advise on the planning, delivery and evaluation of member development activities. It is an all-party group and is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources. The Group is required to report to Cabinet on an annual basis. This report meets this requirement and summarises the work of the Group during the 2019-20 municipal year. The Annual Report sets out information on the provision of member development, expenditure on the member development budget and the progress on Charter Status for Elected Member Development.

1.2 This report also invites Cabinet to consider a recommendation from the Member Development Group that the Council should seek reaccreditation for Member Charter Status and that it do so at the Charter Plus level.

2. Recommended Decision

2.1 To receive and note the report of the Member Development Group on the work of the Group in the 2019-20 municipal year.

2.2 To seek reaccreditation for Charter Status for Elected Member Development when the current period of accreditation ends in July 2021, but not to pursue Charter Plus at this stage.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

3.1 The Member Development Group is required to report to Cabinet on an annual basis. This provides Cabinet with an opportunity to review the work of the Group and the provision of member development..

3.2 The benefits of Charter Status are that it demonstrates that the Council's member development processes are in line with good practice. This provides reassurance to current and potential members, and to other external inspections such as Peer Reviews. It also provides a reassurance to residents that their elected representatives are provided with effective support to enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Cabinet could decide not to seek reaccreditation for Charter Status or to do so at the standard level.

5. Background Information

Annual Report

5.1 The Annual Report of the Member Development Group for 2018-19 is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. This sets out information about the background to the group and its terms of reference and composition. It summarises the main areas of work undertaken by the Group and provides information about the range of development activities undertaken by members of Colchester Borough Council in 2019-20.

Member Charter Status

5.2 The Council was originally awarded Charter Status in July 2011 and was successful in securing reaccreditation in January 2015 and July 2018. Accreditation is for a period of three years, with a light touch interim reassessment after 18 months. This was successfully passed in January 2020.

5.3 The current period of accreditation will end in July 2021 and the Council needs to indicate shortly whether it intends to commit to seek reaccreditation and commit to a reassessment.

5.4 The current framework for Member Charter Status is at Appendix 2. This sets out the three criteria against which the assessment is made and sets out more detailed guidance setting out the examples of the evidence required to demonstrate the criteria has been met. The three criteria against which Charter Status is assessed are as follows:-

- There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support;
- The Council has a strategic approach to councillor development;
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity.

5.5 The benefits of Charter Status are that it demonstrates that the Council's member development processes are in line with good practice. This provides reassurance to current and potential members, and to other external inspections such as Peer Reviews. It also provides a reassurance to residents that their elected representatives are provided with effective support to enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively. However, there is no tangible "reward" for securing Charter Status. It does not provide access to additional resources or specialist training provision.

5.6 There is a higher level of accreditation, known as Charter Plus. There are no additional criteria for Charter Plus, but the Council is required to meet a higher standard and provide further evidence for each of the criteria. The additional requirements are set out in Appendix 1. It should also be stressed that the requirements set out in Appendix 1 are not prescriptive. It is for each authority to demonstrate how it believes it meets the criteria.

5.6 At its meeting on 20 January 2020 the Member Development Group considered whether the Council should seek reaccreditation for Member Charter Status and if so at what level and recommended that the Council should seek reaccreditation and that it should aim to do at Charter Plus level.

In reaching this recommendation the Group took account of the following issues: -

- Member Charter Status ensured that the Council's member development and councillor support processes were fit for purpose and in line with good practice. Whilst it was noted

that the Council received no funding or resources as a result of securing Charter Status, there were clear reputational benefits in that it demonstrated to prospective Councillors and residents that the Council took the development of its members seriously in order to ensure that they were able to fulfil their duties effectively.

- The Council had secured Charter Status on three previous occasions and had previously indicated a long-term ambition to seek Charter Plus Status. It also noted the recommendation from the Charter Assessment team that it consider Charter Plus. It was consistent with the Council's approach to improvement to seek accreditation at the higher level.
- The areas identified in the report as potentially challenging given current resource and practice were noted. However it did not consider that any of these were insurmountable. Engagement with the political group leaders would be key and there was the opportunity to learn from practice in other authorities.
- Some concern was expressed about member and officer resource needed to secure Charter Plus and officer capacity to undertake the necessary work. However, if securing Charter Plus was identified as a priority and further resource was needed, then discussions about appropriate resourcing would need to be held.
- The start of the new municipal year gave an opportunity to implement new processes and procedures, such as a streamlined personal development plan process.
- If the Council sought Charter Plus status but was unsuccessful then it could still be accredited at Charter Status level.

5.8 However, a key element of the Charter is demonstrating that member development is member led and in order to achieve Charter Plus the Council will need to demonstrate even greater member involvement and buy in to member development processes. For example, there will need to be a personal development plan process with a high level of engagement, and Cabinet members and Committee Chairs will need to identify and undertake appropriate development. Whilst efforts will be made to ensure they are as "light touch" as they can be whilst still consistent with the principles of the Charter, these processes will require a considerable time commitment from Councillors, particularly those in leadership positions. In view of this, Group Leaders have been consulted on whether they would support a bid for Charter Plus. Those responses received have indicated that in the present climate, whilst the long term aim should be to secure Charter Plus, the Council should seek reaccreditation in 2021 at Charter Status level and not pursue Charter Status at this stage.

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 The Annual Report sets out expenditure against the member development budget for the 2019-20 municipal year. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

8.2 The LGA fee for the Charter programme is £3000. This would be met from the Member Development Budget. In previous years, the LGA have allowed this to be paid over two

financial years. This is a significant proportion of the member development budget and could potentially impact on the external training and development that could be provided. There are resource implications also in that ensuring the Council meets the charter standards and the preparation for the assessment involves considerable officer resource.

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 – Member Development Group Annual Report

Appendix 2 – Member Development Charter and Charter Plus requirements