

Cabinet

Item

26 January 2022

Report of	Assistant Director of Corporate and Improvement Services	Author	Richard Clifford
Title	Councillor Development Policy and Strategy		
Wards affected	Not Applicable		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report proposes a revised Councillor Development Policy and the introduction of a Councillor Development Strategy.

2. Recommended Decision

2.1 To approve the draft Councillor Development Policy and Councillor Development Strategy and to recommend the Councillor Development Policy to Full Council for adoption.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

3.1 The Councillor Development Policy needs to be reviewed to ensure it remains relevant and up to date. The updated policy proposed the introduction of a Councillor Development Strategy.

3.2 Both the Councillor Development Policy and Strategy are key documents that will support the Council's bid for reaccreditation for the Councillor Development Charter (previously known as Charter Status for Elected Member Development). The benefits of the Charter 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 No alternative options are proposed.

5. Background Information

5.1 The Council has made a commitment to securing the Councillor Development Charter (previously known as Charter Status for Elected Member Development). The timescale for this is that the assessment must be held by the end of March 2022.

5.2 The three criteria for the Councillor Development Charter against which the Council's policies and procedures will be assessed are:-

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

There are a number of elements within each criteria.

5.3 One of the suggested means of demonstrating the commitment to Councillor development is through a Councillor Development policy. The Council has such a policy, which was originally agreed in support of the initial bid for Charter Status in 2011 and it has been reviewed periodically since then. The policy has been reviewed again and some minor amendments have been made to bring it up to date. The revised policy is attached at Appendix 1.

5.4 The most significant change to the policy is the introduction of a Councillor Development Strategy (see paragraph 3.5). This is intended to be a less high level document setting out more practical aspects on the delivery of member development and current member development priorities. It is suggested that this be a live document that can be easily amended by Cabinet on the basis of recommendations from the Group as priorities change.

5.5 A proposed draft Councillor Development Strategy is at Appendix 2. The current development priorities are based on priorities identified through the Councillor training needs analysis and current Council priorities. The links to the Strategic Plan are shown to demonstrate how they link to the Council's strategic priorities. The Strategy also sets out the current preference for delivering development online and for light touch evaluation of member development.

5.6 Both the revised Policy and the Strategy were reviewed by the Member Development Group at its meeting on 21 December. The documents attached to this report incorporate the comments of the Group, who approved their recommendation to Cabinet.

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. One of the objectives of the Councillor Development Strategy is to demonstrate the links between Councillor development priorities and the Strategic Plan.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The LGA fee for the Charter programme is £3000. This has already been met from the previous years Member Development Budget.

8.2 Any training arising from the Councillor Development Strategy will be met from existing Member Development budget

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 2

Councillor Development Policy

Introduction

Colchester Borough Council is committed to supporting local councillors in carrying out their roles as democratically elected representatives of the community and community leaders, and recognises the need to provide appropriate training, learning and development opportunities to help councillors undertake these roles.

Scope and Purpose

1.1 This policy applies to all Councillors.

1.2 The purpose of this Policy is to set out the Council's commitment to provide appropriate learning and development opportunities for all councillors, to enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills they require to be effective across all their roles and to provide a structured and planned approach to learning and development activities.

1.3 The Council recognises that continuing investment and commitment to Councillor's learning and development is integral to achieving the Council's strategic objectives and the delivery of high quality services.

Key Principles

Equality of Access and Opportunities

2.1 All Councillors will have equal access to and participation in training and development opportunities, subject to their personal needs, taking into account those with work or family commitments.

2.2 Councillors will have the opportunity to benefit from training and development opportunities, regardless of disability, race, national ethnic or social origin, gender, sexuality, age or religion.

2.3 All members must have due regard to the Members Code of Conduct and the Nolan principles and regular updates must be provided to members as part of the member development programme.

Councillor-led Approach

2.3 The Council's approach to learning and development will be Councillor-led with representatives from all political groups invited to participate in the planning, delivery and evaluation of Councillor development activities. Councillors are encouraged to identify their own development needs and participate fully in development events.

2.4 The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for member development shall chair an all party Member Development Group. The Group will advise on the planning, delivery and evaluation of Councillor development activities and where appropriate report and make recommendations to

Cabinet on Councillor development issues. In addition to the Portfolio Holder, each political group shall nominate one representative to the Group.

2.5 The Member Development Group will make recommendation to Cabinet and will report to Cabinet on an annual basis.

Resources

2.5 The Council will allocate a budget for Councillor development. The Member Development Group will regularly monitor the Councillor development budget.

2.6 Councillor entitlements to travel and subsistence for attendance at learning and development events is stated in the Members' Allowances Scheme.

Identifying Development Needs

3.1 To support the Council strategic priorities there will be a process for identifying learning and development needs at all levels:-

- Individual
- Political Groups
- Corporate/Strategic

3.2 To identify training and development needs at an individual level every Councillor will be offered the opportunity to formally identify their training needs on a regular basis.

3.3 Identification of learning and development needs at political group level will be through the political group representatives on the member development group.

3.4 Identification of learning and development needs at a corporate or strategic level will be thorough the Council's business planning processes, including the Leadership Team.

3.5 A Councillor Development Strategy should be prepared by the Member Development Group to identify the priority areas for development and how these should be met. The Strategy should identify how these link to the Council's strategic objectives.

Mandatory Training

4.1 Councillors must undertake relevant training and development before sitting on Committees and Panels exercising quasi-judicial functions, the details of which will be set out in the relevant Committee's Procedure Rules.

4.2 All Councillors should undertake regular training in respect of Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity and GDPR.

4.3 All newly appointed Chairs of Committees and Panels must undertake training in chairing skills within 3 months of appointment, unless they have significant experience of chairing meetings in a Local Authority environment.

Delivery of Activities

5.1 The Council will seek to use a wide range of methods to provide Councillors with the opportunities to meet identified learning and development needs. This will include online learning and briefings and training delivered remotely.

5.2 Information about learning and development events will be published well in advance and appropriately publicised.

Evaluation

6.1 The Council will ensure that learning and development is evaluated in benefits and impacts, including value for money. This will include both immediate review of individual learning and development activity and high level evaluation of how learning and development has contributed to the achievement of the Council's strategic objectives.

6.2 As part of this process of evaluation, an annual report on member development activities will be made to Cabinet.

Roles and Responsibilities

7.1 Individual Members are responsible for identifying their learning and development needs and for seeking opportunities to improve their effectiveness and increase their potential. They are responsible for sharing knowledge and skills amongst other members.

7.2 The Member Development Group will be responsible for monitoring the of councillor development and ensure it meets members' needs and for the preparation of the Councillor Development Strategy. The Group will also monitor the councillor training budget, overseeing the evaluation of development and monitoring the application of this policy.

7.3 The day to day management of councillor development will be the responsibility of Democratic Services and a named officer will be identified with responsibility for councillor learning and development. The current officer with responsibility for councillor development is Richard Clifford, Lead Democratic Services Officer.

Leadership Academy

8.1 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 IDEA'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.

Appendix 3

Councillor Development Strategy

Purpose

The purpose of the Councillor Development Strategy is to set out the priorities for Councillor Development within Colchester Borough Council and how this should be delivered. It sits underneath the Councillor Development Policy which sets out the overall framework for Councillor Development and the principles which underpin it.

The Strategy has been prepared by the all party Member Development Group and agreed by Cabinet. The Strategy is designed to be a live document which should be reviewed on a regular basis by the Member Development Group.

Member Development Priority Areas

The current priority areas for member development are set out below. These priority areas have been agreed by the Member Development Group and take account of the results of Training Needs Analyses completed by Councillors. They also take account of priorities identified through the Member Development Group and recommendations from the Council's Committees and Panels.

Subject	Purpose	Links to Strategic Pan
Budget Workshops	<p>To ensure all members are kept informed of the budget setting process and the development of the budget throughout the municipal year.</p> <p>To provide a forum where all members can contribute ideas or suggestions that support budget setting process</p>	Indirectly supports all Strategic Plan priorities
Partnerships	<p>To keep members informed of the Council's work with partners and hoe these contribute to the Council's strategic objectives.</p> <p>To foster greater understanding of the work of partner organisations and how this impacts on the borough</p> <p>To foster better working relationships with partner organisations.</p>	Indirectly supports all Strategic Plan priorities
Community health and wellbeing	To increase members awareness of some of the	Creating Safe, healthy and active communities –

	<p>health related issues facing the borough,</p> <p>To keep members informed of the response by the Council and its partners to the Covid 19 pandemic</p> <p>To help partner organisations to provide key information to partners to promote with the communities they represent.</p>	tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people.
Support for residents and impact of changes to the benefits system	To increase members awareness of some of the changes to the benefits systems, including the ending of the Universal Credit uplift, and the support provided to residents to mitigate this.	Creating Safe, healthy and active communities – tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people.
Local Plan/Garden Community	<p>To keep members updated on the development of the Local Plan.</p> <p>To raise awareness and knowledge of members on policies contained in the emerging and adopted Local Plan, and significant developments in respect of the development of the Garden Community.</p>	Delivering homes for people who need them – create new communities and adopt a new Local Plan that delivers jobs, homes and the infrastructure to meet the borough's future needs.
Resilience and work/life balance for Councillors	To provide Councillors with support and strategies to help them manage the stress and challenges of the role, particularly in the wake of the demands of the Covid 19 pandemic	Indirectly supports all Strategic Plan priorities

Mandatory training

Councillors must undertake relevant training and development before sitting on Committees and Panels exercising quasi-judicial functions. Training on planning, licensing and the code of conduct will be offered at the start of the municipal year to ensure tht those members who are

appointed to regulatory committees have an opportunity to undertake the training and take their place on the Committee.

General refresher sessions should be offered through the course of the municipal year in order to keep members training up to date and to ensure there is a sufficient pool of trained substitutes.

Training on more specific specialised issues should also be considered throughout the course of the municipal year.

Induction

Following each election a structured induction programme for newly elected Councillors must be delivered. The aim of the programme is to ensure members are given the necessary information to enable to take on their role effectively as soon as possible, and to enable them to understand quickly how the Council; works. The content of the structure of the induction programme may vary for year to year, but should be approved by the Member Development Group in advance. It should normally include the following:-

- An introduction to the structure and management of the Council and the Council's companies;
- Key contacts and FAQs;
- Familiarisation with the Council offices;
- Meeting rules and etiquette;
- Access to the relevant IT systems;
- Provision of IT equipment and training in how to use it;
- Mandatory training;
- Code of Conduct.

Delivery tools

A range of tools should be used to deliver member development. Whilst the in person session led by a trainer or senior officer remains at the heart of the member development programme, a flexible approach should be taken and other delivery methods should be used where appropriate, and a blended approach using a number of methods, taking account of different learning styles, may be appropriate.

Alternative methods of development delivery can include:-

- Attendance at external training courses
- The circulation of written briefings and material;
- Webinars
- Online training
- Workbooks

Council has expressed a view that the mandatory training on GDPR, Safeguarding and Equality and Diversity is best delivered through online training.

Since the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, the delivery of member development sessions has moved online and sessions are now delivered through Microsoft Teams. This has led to an increased attendance at member development sessions. This has advantages in that:-

- Members are able to attend without making a visit to the Town Hall, so is less demand on members' time. Development can be more easily slotted in to members other commitments.
- Sessions can be more easily recorded and then made available to members who were unable to attend.
- There is no attendance limit set by the capacity of a meeting room.

Therefore online remains the preferred method for the delivery of member development sessions, although it is recognised that there may be occasions on which an in-person meeting is more suitable.

Evaluation

It is important that development is evaluated to assess its impact to the organisation and to ensure that the resources invested in development are providing value. Member development sessions should be evaluated through the use of feedback forms and significant member development initiatives, such as induction or particular programmes of development in which significant resources has been invested, should be evaluated. However, that evaluation should be comparatively light touch and should be mindful of both officer and Councillor resource.

Where external training is commissioned and providers seek their own feedback/evaluation this should be shared with the Council.

The Member Development Group is responsible for the monitoring the evaluation of member development and should report on annual basis to Cabinet.