

# Executive summary: Charter for Elected Member Development Best practice study



## Introduction

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During 2018, South East Employers engaged with representatives of three local authorities in the South East, East of England and London to conduct a programme of research and in-depth interviews:

- **Essex County Council**
- **The London Borough of Brent**
- **East Hampshire District Council**

In our suite of case study literature, we explore the stories of those organisations leading the way with councillor development, and how they have engaged the Charter for Elected Member Development and 'Charter Plus' (Charter) to enable their ambitions. We look at what they have achieved, and how, focusing on:

- **Drivers:** the key drivers for Charter-enabled councillor development
- **Value:** the specific value of Charter as a framework for implementation/improvement
- **Benefits:** the benefits for councillors, councils and communities

**Goals:** To raise the profile of councillor development as a strategic priority; raise awareness of Charter as an effective tool for building, implementing and managing councillor development; celebrate the progress that has been made, whilst helping to identify and share best practice for the benefit of current and prospective practitioners; and to raise national awareness of South East Employers as a leading provider of Charter accreditation.

**Contributors:** Council Leaders; Chief Executives; Chairs of local authority councillor development groups; non-executive councillors who have benefited from post-Charter development; officers responsible for councillor development; representatives from partner organisations.

## High level findings

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**A. Common drivers.** Councillor development has strong relevance to current challenges and opportunities in local government.

Key drivers included:

- to create a stronger council by promoting and enabling councillors as leaders and integrating them more effectively into the organisation;
- to support council ambitions to become an increasingly strategic, commercially-minded and socially-responsible organisation;
- as part of a broader programme of cultural reform and to demonstrate and enable delivery of a refreshed commitment to the Nolan Principles;
- to make the councillor role more attractive, accessible and achievable in order to promote higher levels of diversity; and
- to improve the quality and take-up of councillor development and drive greater value from it.

## B. Significant benefits.

Robust councillor development (including leadership commitment, clear strategy and adequate resourcing and governance) enables significant benefits for councillors, councils and communities; and contributes to the achievement of strategic objectives, including journeys of renewal and transformation.



Key benefits for councillors recognised:

- helps to ensure councillor needs are identified, understood and addressed;
- enables new councillors to hit the ground running whilst accelerating their integration into the council;
- engages and empowers councillors and councillor diversity by levelling the playing field, democratising knowledge and supporting career development; and
- equips councillors with the skills, knowledge and confidence to lead, serve and contribute more effectively.

Key benefits for councils recognised:

- enables councillors to add greater strategic value, enhancing Council performance and improving problem solving and decision making;
- helps the council to attract, develop and harness the individual value of councillors who are fit for today and tomorrow, supporting succession planning by preparing councillors for future roles;
- contributes to cultural reform and operational efficiency by helping to improve behavioural standards, working relationships, collaboration and procedural adherence;
- fosters a more sophisticated and strategic Member development capability: enabling innovation, expanding horizons and encouraging higher ambitions; and
- contributes to the evolution of the organisation according to local vision.

Key benefits for communities recognised:

- communities and the challenges affecting them are more effectively understood, represented and provided for;
- feedback and enquiries from residents are addressed and actioned more effectively and efficiently;
- residents have greater confidence in their councillors and the council; and
- communities better understand the Council and Council policy, strategy and service delivery.

**C. Recognition of Charter value.** All participants recognised the value of Charter and were positive about their experience of it, confirming that Charter is a valuable enabler for both initiating and improving councillor development, and that the Charter assessment process is of significant value in itself.

Key value of Charter as a framework for implementation and improvement:

- a nationally proven and prestigious path to 'excellence' and an external quality standard against which to more rigorously benchmark, challenge and improve;
- a public demonstration of commitment and a tool with which to more powerfully communicate the prioritisation of, and investment in, councillor development; and
- an opportunity to shape and drive councillor development with a more analytical, evidence-based approach.

**D. No significant challenges:** None of the participants have encountered significant challenges in implementing Charter-enabled councillor development.