

## Best practice case study summary

# Charter for Elected Member Development East Hampshire District Council

### Introduction

This local government best practice case study is part of a series highlighting the value of Member development where enabled by the Charter for Elected Member Development.

We have explored the stories of those organisations leading the way. We aim to raise the profile of Charter-enabled Member development as a highly-effective approach to improvement, drive its consideration as a strategic priority and celebrate the progress that has been made, whilst identifying and sharing best practice for the benefit of current and prospective practitioners.

We have conducted a programme of interviews with key stakeholders from each participating council, seeking real insights and experience. From East Hampshire District Council, we are grateful for the opportunity to speak with:

- Councillor Richard Millard, Leader of the Council
- Gill Kneller, Chief Executive (2019-)
- Sandy Hopkins, Chief Executive (2009-2018)
- Councillor Sally Pond, Chairman of the Councillor Development Panel
- Councillor Ingrid Thomas
- Caroline Tickner, Head of Organisational Development
- James Harris, Deputy Democratic Services Team Leader

### Background

East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) was awarded Charter status in December 2017. The Council has always recognised Councillor development to be important, but from 2012 a greater emphasis was placed on it as an enabler of stronger leadership ethos and capability.

The evolution of Councillor development gathered pace through 2013 and 2014. The HR and Democratic Services functions worked closely to conduct analysis for strategic improvement whilst delivering the existing programme. A Councillor Development Strategy and accompanying Competency Framework were developed and approved by the Council's Cabinet in 2015. The decision to seek Charter accreditation was unanimously agreed the following year. Per the requirements of the Charter framework, a Councillor Development Panel was

established to provide oversight of the strategy as well as delivery of the Charter assessment process.

With a strong foundation of strategic alignment and good practice already in place, the Council found Charter assessment to be a straightforward, efficient and value-adding process, and a good opportunity to establish a new baseline.



**Councillor  
Richard  
Millard**

“Our vision is to be financially independent of all government funding. Revolutionary change is delivering new services that add value to our customers' lives. Councillors play a key leadership role in making this vision a reality.

However, Councillor responsibilities are evolving. Our political and social landscape has altered fundamentally. New pressures and complexities are having a profound impact on the Councillor role. To make progress, we need highly skilled and knowledgeable Councillors who can embrace change, show strong leadership and lobby for support.

Natural leadership competencies need to be continuously developed and built upon to help us understand and respond to new challenges, opportunities and risks. Councillor development is vital to help elected Councillors contribute to the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities whilst providing genuine local leadership of place.”



**Gill Kneller**

“I am delighted that we have been recognised for our investment in supporting our Councillors in developing their capability through targeted programmes and solutions.

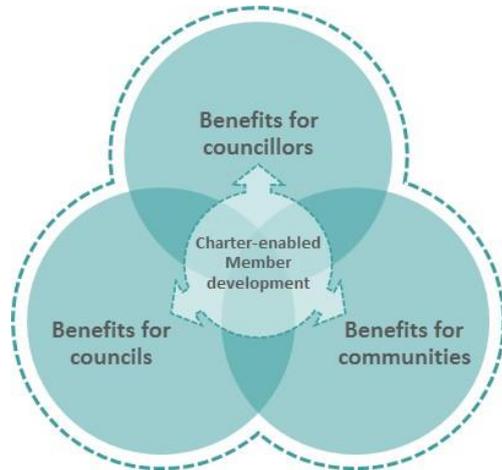
Our Councillors play a key role in defining and shaping our corporate strategy and our Member Development Programme is essential for enhancing the contribution.

It enables us to embrace the breadth of skills and experience that our elected Councillors bring to the Council whilst also ensuring their skills and knowledge are current, with a strong focus on commercialism and digitalisation.”

## Key drivers for Charter-enabled Member development

1. To create a stronger council by promoting and enabling councillors as leaders and integrating them more effectively into the organisation.
2. To support ambitions to become an increasingly strategic, commercially-minded and socially-responsible organisation.

## Benefits at a glance



### Benefits for councillors

- Empowers and enables councillors with the skills, knowledge and confidence to participate and contribute effectively.
- Ensures that councillor needs are identified, understood and addressed.
- Enhances support for councillors and demonstrates that they are valued.

### Benefits for councils

- Helps the council to attract, develop and harness the individual value of councillors who are fit for today and tomorrow.
- Helps to develop councillors who are more engaged in the council and more aligned to its governance, strategy and objectives.
- Supports the ongoing evolution of the council into a flatter and more collegiate, business-disciplined organisation.

### Benefits for communities

- 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.



**Councillor  
Richard  
Millard**

“We’re embracing a more modern, business-based approach...It is critical that we help [Members] become comfortable with our new pace and direction.

As local government continues to evolve and expectations of ‘professional’ Councillor development become the norm, we expect Charter to become more prevalent.

Charter is the seal of approval: ‘job done’.

We are very Member-focused and inclusive in planning our development interventions...They set the targets and we take them to the level they want to achieve.

First and foremost we focus on ensuring our Councillors are fit for purpose...because we have a duty of care to protect them.

Member development is a fundamental factor in succession planning.

Member development [is] helping to address capability gaps. At the same time, it helps us to leverage the skills and competencies that new Councillors bring with them.

A good base knowledge and understanding is in place and the right information is filtering through the right channels at the right times. Our Members are confident that they know what they need to know...They’re not afraid to question and challenge, but they’re also comfortable trusting us to direct strategy.”



**Sandy  
Hopkins**

“Our challenge is to apply business principles and get the very best out of our 44 Councillors, all of whom contribute very different skillsets.

We’re delighted to align our journey with Charter. It’s a powerful symbol of an effective plan to deliver critical competencies. We strive to be at the leading edge and our Charter status helps secure our position.

We are better positioned to engage Councillors in robust dialogue about their...capability and development needs.

We can more easily anticipate and respond to new and emerging requirements, focussing on more targeted and cost-effective interventions.

We want to be a learning organisation and we make every effort to include our Councillors in that.

Our Councillors are much better at understanding and respecting how the Council operates.

Our investment...gives Councillors the awareness and tools to adapt to the challenges of running public services in an ever-changing and increasingly commercial world.

We’re creating a stronger and more unified Council...built on a culture of teamwork, equality and respect.”

## Specific value of Charter as a framework for implementation and improvement

1. An external quality standard against which to more rigorously benchmark, challenge and improve.
2. A tool with which to more powerfully communicate the prioritisation of, and investment in, councillor development.
3. An opportunity to shape and drive the councillor development agenda with a more analytical, evidence-based approach.

## Member development at EHDC today

Councillor development at EHDC is supported by a Councillor Development Panel established in 2016.

While the panel is apolitical and there are no statutory members, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Councillor Development sits on the panel. The Chairman of the panel is appointed by the Council each year.

There is a dedicated budget, and dedicated management and administration support from the Organisational Development and Democratic Services departments.

The Council has a well-defined vision for Councillor development: all elected Councillors should have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform effectively in their current or future roles within the Council. The vision is underpinned by the following principles:

- development is available to all Councillors irrespective of political allegiance;
- development is based upon agreed training needs as identified through the needs analysis process;
- development will be delivered through methods which ensure equality of access and account for different learning styles; and
- the Council will recognise that Councillors may have transferable skills which can help them perform their Council role.

The Council maintains a Councillor Development Strategy, reviewed every two years to ensure continued alignment to strategic priorities and development needs. The aims of the strategy are to:

- create a clear framework for Councillor development based on individual and organisational needs;
- ensure all Councillors have the necessary skills at the required level to conduct their roles effectively;
- ensure Councillors have the skills and knowledge needed to oversee the delivery of high-quality public services through their community leadership roles;
- ensure Councillors feel confident to undertake their roles;



**Councillor Sally Pond**

“Training is a must for any career and Councillors are no exception...It gives us confidence we can transfer to our residents. It helps keep our skills – both the ‘soft’ and the technical – fresh and relevant...It also helps us respond appropriately to the questions of others, build good working relationships with our colleagues and partners in local government, and communicate more effectively in general.

Good training also helps to level the playing field between Councillors.

Training makes Council knowledge and dialogue open and accessible to all, giving everyone the tools they need to get involved and make a difference.

We strive to help Councillors achieve a balance between their demanding roles inside and outside of the Council, including dedicated time for development.

The sharing of information is an invitation to get involved and a demonstration that our views and questions are important.

To become a more resilient organisation, we need to build a strong base of skilled, knowledgeable and experienced Councillors.

Our development offer is...helping us define our requirements and letting people know what they’re signing up for. Setting realistic expectations whilst providing assurance about help and support is the right way to attract and inspire tomorrow’s Councillors.

We’re all aware that we need to do more, and it starts with understanding what the District Council actually does.”



**Councillor Ingrid Thomas**

“A strong training programme for Councillors is essential...It takes a lot of training to become truly knowledgeable. And then there’s the constant change. It would be impossible to keep up without training.”



**Councillor Caroline Tickner**

“Councillor development is highly valued because it helps us to build leadership capability.

Recognising and harnessing the individual value of each and every Councillor can make the difference between good and great local government.

Charter provided robust quality assurance.”

- ensure Councillors are fully aware of their responsibilities and accountabilities to deliver good governance;
- support the continued development of Councillors to prepare them for roles they may fill in the future;
- attract and retain high calibre Councillors; and
- provide all Councillors with the opportunity for development.

The Council has developed a Councillor Competency Framework, based on the Local Government Association Political Skills Framework, setting out the knowledge and skills that Councillors need. The framework is structured around six core skill areas:

- Local leadership
- Partnership working
- Communication skills
- Political understanding
- Policy development and assurance
- Regulating and monitoring

The Council runs an annual Councillor Development Programme, updated every year to accommodate changing development priorities. These are identified through: a formal Training Needs Analysis process (supplemented by private personal development reviews); a review of the corporate strategy for new training requirements; and a similar review of Councillor role descriptions.

Diverse development needs and learning styles are catered for through a range of delivery formats, including:

- training courses;
- seminars;
- external conferences;
- briefings;
- e-learning;
- distance learning;
- visits to other councils or relevant partners;
- shadowing; and
- mentoring.

**Caroline Tickner**

*Continued*

“The assessment process was helpful in itself. The requirement to document everything helped us to formally consolidate our new approach.

Our Charter accreditation clearly demonstrates our level of investment in their development. It brings status to the Council whilst sending a compelling message to existing and prospective Councillors: ‘we value your role and take your development seriously, supporting you to become the best you can be’.

A facilitated forum for development is a powerful opportunity on multiple levels, with a reach that goes much further and deeper than knowledge transfer.

Our new and improved approach to Councillor development...accelerates effective working and developmental relationships...helps us to assess individual Councillor capability with greater precision and objectivity...provides good quality assurance for our training solutions...[and] we’re able to prepare [Councillors] for their next steps more easily and effectively.

Structured and consistent induction, knowledge transfer and development... contribute to continuity and the preservation of capability.”



**James Harris**

“Charter has been a great catalyst for improvement.

Charter gave us [a benchmark] helping us identify opportunities to reinforce and enhance what we’d already built.

Following the Charter framework has refined our focus on what Councillors want and need, whilst helping us make sure the training we put in place is meaningful.

Aligning to a recognised standard makes it easier to communicate our offer and promote becoming a Councillor.

Charter also helps to give confidence to the public that their Councillors are capable and professional.

Charter helped us identify effective tools to access the data we need to analyse performance, risks and opportunities at a more granular level.

Charter also gave us a process...to ensure our training programme remains fit for purpose.

Councillors deserve to be equipped with the right knowledge and skills to make responsible, professional decisions.”