The Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus

Supporting continuing professional development for councillors

Foreword

Serving as a councillor is a responsibility, a privilege and a hugely rewarding undertaking. At its best, local government provides the strong and ambitious leadership that ensures the nation remains fit and well, economically resilient and continues to thrive.

More than ever before, councillors' role as political, civic and community leaders requires us to offer visible, responsive and resilient leadership as we advocate on behalf of our residents and help shape places in which people want to live, work and play.

Our regular polling shows that local councils and councillors are the most trusted to take decisions about their local areas. Democracy and decision-making are strengthened when councillors are empowered to speak to, and for, our communities and to support the effective business of local government. If we are to continue to meet the expectations of those we serve, in an ever-changing world, we need to make sure we have the skills and expertise to carry out our duties.

The Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus provides councils with a robust framework, but flexible to local needs, to ensure effective leadership, equip their members with the support they need, and provide resilience in times of challenge. The council I lead, Central Bedfordshire Council, is accredited to the Councillor Development Charter and currently working towards Charter Plus. So I know from first hand experience the benefits of this guidance in helping councils build an even more effective and positive approach to ensuring all councillors are developed and supported to be effective in their roles.

These Charters have been developed as part of the LGA's coordinated approach to sector-led improvement across local government. This aims to help councils continue their own improvement journey, take up our support tools and offers and contribute to the improvement of local government as a whole.

The framework has been updated based on what councils have told us would help their members be empowered to work effectively, and be responsive and resilient – including in more challenging times – while being mindful of the importance of promoting positive personal wellbeing through everything we do. The Charter is flexible, with a strong emphasis on local approach, and aims to help councils consider their existing practices, celebrate what is working, and share good practice.

I know local government is committed to investing in councillors' growth and development, and I would strongly encourage all local areas to adopt the Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus as a guide and benchmark as part of your improvement journey. Continued professional development is an important tool for effective democracy and good governance, and I hope councils' action will help to inspire the next generation of councillors and political leaders to stand for election and make a difference to their communities.

Councillor James Jamieson
Chairman, Local Government Association

Values and purpose

Learning and development is an important tool for councils, councillors and officers to deliver what our communities need. Inspiring local communities and ensuring the wellbeing of the people and places we represent takes ambitious leadership – and effective political leadership is at the heart of healthy democracy; with councillors who are well equipped and supported, resilient in times of challenge or disruption to business as usual, and confident to make a difference, deliver and be trusted.

The Charter and Charter Plus helps councils to support councillor development and recognises those that have built an effective approach.

This document will take you through:

• benefits of achieving the charter and charter plus

• resource commitments involved

• details of each element and the requirements to achieve the charter

• the types of evidence you could use.

The framework in this document gives concise and clear guidance on how to achieve the charter without being too onerous or overly bureaucratic.

The charter is flexible and focuses positively and supportively on what councils already have in place.

There is a strong emphasis on a local approach to a national framework. Rather than dictating a council's strategy, content or delivery mechanisms, the emphasis is on ensuring that all councillors are appropriately developed and supported to be effective in their roles.

The Charter and Charter Plus is also based on the principles of sector-led improvement, whereby councils:

• are responsible for their own performance

• are accountable locally, not nationally

• have a sense of collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole

• can access support and tools from the LGA and regional organisations.

Benefits

The following benefits have been reported by councils through the regional local government organisations which asses and award the Charter.

Benefits: **processes and strategies**

- Concise and clear guidance on how to achieve the charter without being too onerous or overly bureaucratic.
- Flexible and focuses positively and supportively on what councils already have in place – a local approach to a national framework.
- Helps councils decide what to prioritise and improve.
- Councillor development needs are better understood and supported.
- Demonstrates the value placed on councillors carrying out their important and complex role.
- Helps set aside time to reflect and celebrate the good practice already happening.

Benefits: **impact on councillors**

- The quality of councillor development is improved.
- New councillors are better prepared for their roles and responsibilities.
- Councillor progression is better enabled.
- Helps ensure councillors can operate at their most knowledgeable, skilled and effective.
- Increases councillors' competence and confidence.
- Helps councillors navigate the ever more complex and demanding role and local government landscape.
- Self-care and reflection for councillors through development and growth.

Benefits: **impact on all partners**

- Strengthens member-officer relationships.
- Helps ensure effective top team political and managerial leadership.
- Encourages robust and accountable decision making.
- Helps ensure proactive succession planning.
- Helps improve councillor diversity.
- Enhances democracy and participation.

- Strengthens relationships with residents and partners.
- Improves outcomes for communities.
- Fosters a culture of learning and support within the council and with partners.

Additional benefits of Charter Plus accreditation

- Highest level of commitment and a holistic approach means the benefits filter more widely.
- Case studies highlight successes and encourage more councillors to participate.
- Evaluation ensures high quality learning and development is delivered to councillors.
- Learning and development for councillors supports the council's objectives.
- Councillors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- Successful and impactful Personal Development Plans (PDPs) for councillors.
- Deeper intel of the impact of learning and development.
- Helps prioritise, horizon-scan and deliver the 'next level' of member development.
- Strengthened place-based focus by sharing development opportunities and promoting the role of the councillor to other organisations in the local area.
- Effective succession planning and candidate recruitment activities.
- Evaluation draws out the impacts on the community through feedback from local partners.

Resource commitment

- The accreditation process differs across the regions to account for local variations.
- The framework gives concise and clear guidance on how to achieve the charter without being too onerous or overly bureaucratic.
- A flexible approach that focuses positively and supportively on what councils already have in place – a local approach to a national framework.
- Examples of evidence are clearly detailed in the framework.
- Many councils are already doing this work – the charter is a chance for this to be recognised.

Please contact your regional local government organisation or the Local Government Association **virginia.ponton@local.gov.uk** for more information.

Guidelines and evidence

There are three essential criteria to achieving the charter:

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 councillors' skills and knowledge.

Within each of these there are a number of elements and requirements to demonstrate that the criteria are being met.

These do not dictate what should be in the strategy, the nature of the content or the delivery mechanisms that should be used. The emphasis is on ensuring that all councillors are appropriately developed and supported so that they can be effective in their roles

The following lists are intended to indicate the sorts of evidence that can be used to show that the council's approach to member development meets the charter criteria. Note that:

- there is no need to show all the evidence listed

- this does not preclude the use of other evidence that may not be listed. The emphasis is on a local approach to a national framework

- some are likely to be stronger indicators than others

- some pieces of evidence may be applicable to more than one element and criteria

As described over the next pages, evidence is wide-ranging and could include anything that demonstrates meeting the requirements, for example:

- meeting notes

- feedback from councillors and officers

- strategy and policy documents

- details of development events

Requirements and examples of evidence

Criterion 1 There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support

Element 1.1
Political and managerial leadership is committed to the development of councillors

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• Clear commitment from the top political and managerial leadership • Cross-party councillor development group that meets regularly • Clear councillor development strategy which is embedded into practice and regularly reviewed • Named councillor/s and officer/s responsible for councillor development	• Clear commitment from top political and managerial leadership to share development opportunities across local government tiers (including with parish and town councils) • Strategic approach to forward planning of councillor development	• Signed commitment to achieving the charter • Councillors are included in any Investors in People (IiP) Award questioning process • Strategies are in place to support councillor development • Cross-party councillor development group showing active involvement of councillors in the learning and development process

Element 1.2
The council actively promotes democratic participation, publicises the role of councillors as community leaders, and proactively engages with under-represented groups

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• The council holds a range of activities and events to encourage people to become councillors	• The council takes action to encourage people to become councillors, particularly from under-represented groups and evaluates the impact and success of the activities • The council provides information on democratic and electoral processes • The council builds links with local businesses and employers to promote the role of the councillor	• Local democracy week action plan, programme of activities and review • Youth council • LGA's Be a Councillor campaign • Citizenship links with local schools, colleges and universities • Presentations in the community and targeting under-represented groups • Prospective councillor events and materials on roles, responsibilities and next steps • 'Day in the life of a councillor'

Element 1.3
The council is committed to ensuring equal access to learning and development for all councillors

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• Statistical analysis of cultural and personal circumstances • Timing of councillor development takes account of cultural and personal circumstances • All councillors have equal access to development • The development programme includes a range of delivery methods to meet different learning styles • Councillors are regularly updated on councillor development activities • Access to existing and/or necessary new learning continues in challenging times or disruption to business as usual	• Impact analysis of access is monitored, reviewed and actioned	• Statistical evidence of attendance • A range of learning and development options to meet individual needs are provided and promoted – and these are resilient in challenging times or disruption to business as usual • A range of communication methods e.g. internet / intranet / social media is used to promote development opportunities • Councillors confirm that action is taken to respond to and accommodate diversity of needs • Evidenced flexibility and consideration of the timing of development events

Element 1.4
The council has designated resource and budget for councillor development which is adequate to meet priority development needs

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• Appropriate and adequate officer resources are in place to support councillor development • Budget is explicit and clearly identified and monitored • Budget reports	• Councillor development and support staff have their own skills development programme • The officer/s are involved in regional and national learning networks to support continuing professional development (CPD) • The budget is properly reviewed, set and prioritised by the cross-party councillor development group	• Officer/s job descriptions • Named officer/s in information distributed to councillors and staff • Councillors are able to name the officer/s • The officer/s are able to demonstrate their understanding of learning and development in a political context • Cross-party councillor development group terms of reference and active involvement of councillors in the learning and development process demonstrated • Information that informs councillors of the existence of the budget • Minutes of meetings that shows councillors' involvement in setting and monitoring the budget • Councillors confirm that the budget is sufficient to meet priority current and future development needs

Criterion 2 The council has a strategic approach to councillor development

Element 2.1		
The council has councillor development strategy in place		
Requirements for Charter	**Requirements for Charter+**	**Examples of evidence**
• The strategy is developed and monitored by the cross-party councillor development group • Strategy identifies priority development needs and makes stated and clear links with council's corporate/strategic objectives as well as risk management processes for challenging times or disruption to business as usual • The strategy is regularly reviewed (at least once every three years) by the cross-party councillor development group • The strategy includes an induction process that is evaluated after each election	• The cross-party councillor development group leads the evaluation of the strategy and implements improvements	• A strategy is in place • Notes of councillor development meetings showing monitoring and evaluation of the strategy • Councillor development group demonstrates their involvement in formulating the strategy • Overview and scrutiny review of the effectiveness of the strategy • Those involved in formulating the strategy can demonstrate how it links to the corporate/strategic objectives and the rationale behind stated priorities

Element 2.2
The council has a structured process for regularly assessing councillors' individual learning and development needs based on focused objectives

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• A process exists to identify individual development needs in the form of a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) or Personal Development Plans (PDP) and is working effectively • The council is able to quickly to assess any new and different needs in challenging times or disruption to business as usual, and be able to offer any new learning and development needed	• All councillors are offered PDPs and more than half of councillors take them up • Council has a process for individual councillor reviews to reflect on strengths and support progression	• Councillor role descriptions • Training Needs Analysis • Personal Development Plans • Use of the LGA Political Skills Framework and/or The 21st Century Councillor

Element 2.3
The various councillor roles are clearly defined and outline how they contribute to the achievement of community, political and council objectives

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• Councillors demonstrate an understanding of the skills and knowledge required in their ward and council wide roles • Councillor role descriptions exist and are maintained for all key roles including the ward councillor • Councillors are clear about what the council is trying to achieve and the key role they play in this as councillors	• Role descriptions are used for the recruitment and selection of candidates and to identify and prioritise development needs • Role descriptions are used to support succession planning • Evidence that councillors are clear about: ◦ the role of partner bodies ◦ the role of other stakeholders ◦ their own role on partner bodies ◦ their own role in relation to other stakeholder bodies	• Systems are in place to identify individual development and support needs • Learning styles and training needs analysis • Personal Development Plans link to role and corporate objectives • Councillors are able to describe how learning and development activities have helped them to carry out their role and contribute to the achievement of the council's objectives

Element 2.4
The council has a structured process for assessing current and future leadership and executive team development needs

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• Structured process to assess current and future leadership development needs • This takes into account corporate risk management planning for any challenging times or disruption to business as usual • A development plan is in place that supports the top political and management teams in learning about each other and working effectively together • Leadership development is used to support future succession planning	• Leaders, cabinet members and chairs have identified and undertaken development appropriate to their responsible area • A programme to develop the next generation of leaders is in place as part of the council's approach to succession planning	• Process in place to identify leadership requirements • Leadership Development Plans • 360 Degree Leadership Audits • Political leadership development programmes e.g. LGA Leadership Academy • Events that support councillor / officer team building • Joint events with executive and senior management • Succession planning strategies • Community leadership development programmes • The political leadership can describe actions taken to develop political leadership capacity • The political and managerial leadership can give examples of how they work together as a team

Element 2.5
There is a corporate councillor learning and development plan in place

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• The plan links to council's corporate objectives and the development of councillors • The plan includes individuals, committees and political leadership needs	• The plan clearly prioritises learning and development that supports the corporate objectives	• Corporate councillor learning and development plan • The cross-party councillor development task group are able to explain how learning and development activities are prioritised

Criterion 3. Learning and development is effective in building skills and knowledge

Element 3.1
Investment in learning and development is regularly evaluated and improvements implemented

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• Evaluation strategy is in place to analyse the cost and benefits of councillor development • Evaluation and improvement processes take into account corporate risk management and reviews taken during/after any times of in challenging times or disruption to business as usual • Political and managerial leadership display a good understanding of both the costs and benefits of development activities • Councillors can describe why they did certain activities, what they learnt and what difference it has made to them carrying out their various roles • Continuous improvement in the approach to developing councillors is identified and implemented	• Evaluation strategy is in place to analyse the impact of councillor development activities • Some form of impact assessment at the corporate and community level exists and is used to evaluate the impact of development (e.g. feedback from partners is actively sought) • Case studies of how learning and development has impacted on individual and corporate performance • There are links to an evaluation strategy • Evaluation outcomes inform change and drive continuous improvement • A quality assurance process is in place	• Evaluation strategy is in place and is effective • Analysis of costs and benefits to the council from councillor learning and development • Case studies of how learning and development has impacted on individual and corporate performance • Notes of meetings, focus groups, questionnaires or interviews involving councillors evaluating the impact of their development on overall performance • Political and managerial leadership display a good understanding of both the costs and benefits of development activities • Political and managerial leadership can provide examples and evidence of the impact and benefits of councillor development • Written reviews of learning and development activities with recommendations for change **continues...**

Element 3.1 (continued)
Investment in learning and development is regularly evaluated and improvements implemented

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
		• Notes of meetings, reports, personal statements providing examples of improvements to learning activities • Changes to development programmes and a rationale for the changes made • Councillors can describe what has been done to improve the development activities • Quality assurance process is in place and is effective

Element 3.2
Learning is shared with other councillors and, where appropriate, with officers and stakeholders to encourage capacity building and a culture of learning across the council and externally

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter+	Examples of evidence
• Knowledge and learning are shared with councillors' peers, officers and others as with other councils and organisations and particularly in challenging times or disruption to business as usual	• There is an effective process in place for disseminating, sharing and exchanging knowledge and learning	• Examples of reports, briefing sessions, and information exchange systems used to capture and disseminate learning programmes of joint learning exchanges • Councillor formal / informal mentoring arrangements • Hosting case study visits • Developing councillor champions for topic areas • Councillors can give examples of how they have supported and learned from the development of others

Produced in conjunction with the following organisations

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