

The Councillor Development Charter (and Charter Plus)

Learning and development for councillors is important in ensuring that councils and councillors deliver what communities need. The Councillor Development Charter supports councils to enrich their councillor development programmes.

Councillor development

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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

- 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.

Guidelines and evidence

- 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 pieces of evidence 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.

community leaders, and proactively engages with underrepresented groups

Requirements for Charter

- The council holds a range of activities and events to encourage people to become councillors.

Requirements for Charter Plus

- The council takes action to encourage people to become councillors, particularly from underrepresented 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.

Examples of evidence

- 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

- Budget is explicit and clearly identified and monitored
- Budget reports

Requirements for Charter Plus

- 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

Examples of evidence

- 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

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

Requirements for Charter Plus

- 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

Examples of evidence

- 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

- 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

Requirements for Charter Plus

- 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

- A programme to develop the next generation of leaders is in place as part of the council's approach to succession planning

Examples of evidence

- 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

- The plan links to council's corporate objectives and the development of councillors
- The plan includes individuals, committees and political leadership needs

Requirements for Charter Plus

- The plan clearly prioritises learning and development that supports the corporate objectives

Examples of evidence

- Corporate councillor learning and development plan

- A quality assurance process is in place

Examples of evidence

- 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
- 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

- 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