

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

North West Charter for Member Development - Level 2

24th June 2010

Report of Head of Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To request Council Business Committee to consider the way forward in respect of gaining Level 2 of the North West Charter for Member Development.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATION

That Members consider the way forward in respect of gaining Level 2 of the North West Charter for Member Development.

1. Introduction

Members will recall that the Council took the decision in 2002 to sign up to the North West Charter for elected Member Development. Leading up to the 2007 elections work was undertaken to achieve level 1 of the North West Charter for Member Development. Unfortunately, the Council was not successful in its efforts this time.

The Council continued its work towards achieving level 1 and was successful in its second attempt in 2008. Members of the Committee travelled to Manchester to receive the Charter and whilst there, were awarded the prestigious Municipal Journal Award for Member Development.

2. Report

To maintain the Charter standards, authorities are reviewed three years after being awarded the Charter. Councils have to demonstrate that they are still committed to Member Development and are maintaining the same level of standards. This means that Lancaster City Council is due to be reviewed in summer 2011.

However there is the option for the Council to be assessed for level 2 of the Charter rather than the 3 year review at level 1. Many local authorities are now trying to achieve level 2 of the Charter rather than being reviewed at level 1.

The Corporate Plan 2010-13 sets out a key Corporate Indicator, CH11, for the Council to achieve level 2 of the Charter next year which would mean that the Council would skip the review of level 1.

To qualify for Level 2 of the Charter a local authority has to prove that a particular aspect of Members development has had a positive impact on the Community and the Authority.

The Council would need to provide evidence to support its application, demonstrating:

- The impact of Member Development on the work of Lancaster City Council
- Excellence in one or more areas of Member development practice
- Commitment to continuous improvement in Member development

Officers have undertaken some initial work on ideas for a Level 2 assessment.

The idea that is most favourable is based on developing councillors' skills in relation to Ward and Community Leadership and promoting their community engagement role. More work is required to determine the precise nature of such a development programme and whether such a project could be sufficiently quantifiable.

To provide the evidence required to achieve Level 2, there must be a 'baseline' measurement followed by a measurement after the Member development has taken place which shows the positive change that has taken place.

As an example to illustrate this, Blackpool Borough Council concentrated on the Licensing training programme provided to their Members prior to the Licensing Act 2003; the impact that this training had on the Councillors in their roles as licensing panel Members; their interaction with other agencies/bodies involved in the licensing process, and the impact on the wider community.

Blackpool undertook a consultation process with the bodies/organisations from outside the Council that had been involved in the Licensing process to gain an understanding of their experiences of the licensing process and how they felt the training undertaken by Members had affected their decision making skills and improved knowledge of the licensing legislation.

The NWE0 have produced a comprehensive toolkit to aid a level 2 assessment. It gives practical lesson on how to achieve level 2 of the Charter and gives examples on how the all important community impact assessment can be measured. This can be viewed at www.nweo.org.uk/ElectedMembers/MemberCharter/Evaluation+Toolkit+-+Community+Impact/ and copies will be available at the meeting..

The guidance states :

Put simply, evaluating the impact of Member development means checking if residents in the community are getting, seeing and feeling the benefits of their elected representatives doing more learning and development.

The package of skills which this demands from Councillors – individually or working as a team – is extensive: listening; negotiating; probing and scrutinising; handling contradiction; lobbying; campaigning; community development; conflict resolution; mediation; and, of course, decision making.

There are still serious gaps to overcome between community perceptions and awareness of the work of local Elected Members, and Members' own views about whether they are doing a good job. Evaluation might be able to help bridge those gaps in perceptions by further demonstrating how Members' work helps improve the lives of their constituents.

Our key messages are: that Members and Officers should keep a focus on the community when looking at the results of Member development; and that they can enjoy finding out what difference was made by all their hard work on training, mentoring, e-learning, study visits and the rest. Member development is now well established. Perceptions of Member development have come a long way from being seen as an add-on or afterthought, or as an excuse to attend junkets or fancy conferences. However, we remain perhaps a long way off fully understanding or recognising the true extent of the potential value of Member development, not just for Members themselves but for communities. More advanced evaluation is one tool to enable this value to be identified and appreciated.

3. Proposal

At this stage the Committee is asked to confirm that the wish to move forward with the intention of applying for Level 2 status and to determine a way forward.

One of the underlying principles in the Charter is that all member development should be 'member-led' and it is important therefore that members are involved in determining the project on which the assessment is based and are fully supportive.

Members are therefore requested to put forward suggestions at this meeting and determine the project which should be progressed.

Alternatively Members may wish to invite views from all Councillors and establish a small working group of interested councillors to meet informally and consider in more depth any ideas proposed for the level 2 application. If Members agree this option, it is recommended that the decision on which project to pursue should be delegated to the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the Council Business Committee.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The work of Member Development supports Councillors in delivering the corporate vision and priorities.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

There are no direct implications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any costs associated with a level 2 assessment must be contained within the Member Development budget for 2010/11 and 2011/12.

The budget for 2010/11 is set at £9,900 with a forecasted budget of £14,900 in 2011/12 to ensure that a full induction programme can be provided for new councillors following the 2011 city Council elections.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NWEO Member Development Charter
Making a Difference – Toolkit on Elected
Member Development

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