

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

North West Employers Organisation Member Development Charter 13 January 2011

Report of the Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

Members are asked to consider whether attempting a submission for the North West Employers' (NWEO) Member Development Charter Level 2 is appropriate at this time or whether a Level 1 review process should be undertaken instead, leaving open the option to apply for Level 2 at a later date.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That preparation of a submission for the NWEO Member Development Charter Level 2 be postponed until there are more resources available and a suitable topic presents itself to secure a successful outcome.**
- (2) That the Level 1 review process be undertaken in 2011.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Members will recall that the Committee has received two reports this year regarding the NWEO Member Development Charter.
- 1.2 The first report, on 24 June 2010 asked Members to consider the way forward in respect of applying for level 2 of the Charter. It was reported that the Council would be required to undertake a review in November 2011 in order to maintain the authority's level 1 status. However the Corporate Plan 2010-13 included a key corporate indicator (CH11) for the Council to achieve level 2 of the Charter in 2011.
- 1.3 As Members are aware, in order to achieve level 2 Councils must pass a rigorous, evidence based assessment process, proving that a particular aspect of Member Development has had a positive impact on the community and on the authority itself. 'Before and after' evidence must be gathered by officers. Some kind of baseline measurement must be taken to measure the position 'before' and to illustrate the impact 'after'.
- 1.4 Members agreed in June that work would need to be done in preparation for a level 2 submission in line with the Corporate Plan, although the two possible

topics suggested at that meeting, community engagement or the role of Councillors as community leaders, were subsequently discounted when the NWE0 expressed concerns about the suitability of both. At the September meeting Members discussed using the induction training process in May 2011 as the basis of a level 2 submission instead. It was agreed that this should be taken forward subject to NWE0 approval.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 Whilst the target of achieving level 2 appears in the Council's Corporate Plan for 2011, it is not something which the Council must achieve. It is a discretionary activity. Members will be aware that the priorities in the Plan were recently reviewed by Cabinet in light of the Council's financial position. Cabinet requested that officers bring forward proposals to reduce expenditure on services which do not meet the priorities as reviewed and/or meet the priorities more efficiently. In line with Cabinet's request, the Committee is therefore asked to consider whether it would be more appropriate to postpone working towards level 2 and request a review to maintain level 1 in 2011.
- 2.2 There are three other relevant points for the Committee to consider. Firstly, since the target was set in the Corporate Plan, Democratic Services has been restructured and is now part of the new Governance service. Since the restructure on 1 October 2010, the Senior Democratic Support Officer (SDSO) previously responsible for Member Development has left the authority. Her post is held vacant in the restructure until 1 January 2012. The other SDSO post has been vacant since 1 October 2010 and the hiatus has meant that no real progress has been made on work towards level 2 since the Committee meeting in September. A new SDSO will take up the vacant post in January 2011 and the remit of that officer will include Member Development. The priority when he starts work will be to plan and deliver induction training for any new Members joining the authority after the May 2011 elections.
- 2.3 Secondly, a great deal of time and effort at a senior level will be required to ensure a successful submission for level 2, the exemplar standard. The application process for level 1 required work by the SDSO to put together the necessary portfolio of evidence for submission in 2007. The standards demanded to pass the assessment are high and the Council was unsuccessful with its first attempt in 2007. Work had to begin again for a further submission in 2008, which was a success.
- 2.4 Finally, research by officers on the type of projects that have been successful in achieve level 2 have shown that they are quite focussed and specific and tend to be around areas where Members have a special interest in developing their knowledge, Corporate Parenting, Licensing, Waste Management, for example. Induction training was suggested as a topic by officers with cost effectiveness in mind, since induction training will need to be carried out anyway if new Members are elected to the Council. However, cost considerations are perhaps not the best motivator to a successful application. Member support and enthusiasm for the topic would appear to be the key to the submissions that have been successful.

3.0 Details of Consultation

3.1 No consultation has taken place at this stage.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

	Option 1: To apply for a review of level 1 and not pursue level 2 in 2011.	Option 2: To pursue an application for level 2 using the induction programme, or some other topic, as the theme.	Option 3: To withdraw from the Charter scheme.
Advantages	<p>Savings on officer and Member time preparing the submission of a level 2 bid. This would be a significant piece of work for senior officers.</p> <p>Successful review of level 1 would maintain the Council's charter status.</p> <p>Leaves the option open to prepare a submission for level 2 at a future date when a suitable topic is more obvious and there are resources in Democratic Services to liaise with Members and the NWEO fully to ensure the application is successful.</p>	<p>If the application is successful, the award of level 2 indicates that the authority has reached exemplar standard in Member Development.</p>	<p>There would be savings on officer and Member time preparing for the review and/or level 2 submission.</p>
Dis-advantages	<p>A review in order to maintain level 1 status would require some officer and Member time and effort. However this would not be as demanding or complex as applying for level 2.</p>	<p>Will not deliver the target in the Corporate Plan, however the Plan and the Council's priorities are being reviewed in light of the financial cut backs.</p>	<p>Authorities holding Charter status have made a commitment to the development of their elected Members. Withdrawing from the scheme could be seen as undermining that commitment.</p>
Risks	<p>There are no risks involved. Participating in the NWEO Charter, at any level, is not mandatory.</p>	<p>Risk of spending a lot of time and effort on a submission which is not successful.</p>	<p>Reputational risks. Charter status indicates a high standard of training and development is on offer to Elected Members.</p>

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 In view of the contents of this report it is recommended that, rather than applying for level 2 of the Charter the level 1 review process be undertaken in 2011 to ensure that the Council keeps its level 1 status for a further 3 years. During this time the Council would be able to make an application for level 2 status should more resources become available and a suitable topic become apparent.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of applying for level 2 of the Charter would be made up of officer time and training and development costs. Officer time would be primarily the SDSO within Democratic Services with responsibility for Member Development. There are two SDSO posts in the service, however one is being held vacant until January 2012 as part of the Governance service restructure. As part of the 2011/12 budget process the budget for Member Development for 2011/12 is currently estimated at £14,800, a higher amount than 2010/11 to reflect the need for a full induction programme for any new Members.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

None.

Information Services:

None.

Property:

None.

Open Spaces:

None.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

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

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Council Business Committee reports and agenda for 24 June 2010 and 2 September 2010.

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