



**North West
Employers**

SUPPORT. KNOWLEDGE. NETWORK.

North West Charter on Elected Member Development

Charter Process

Level 1, Level 1 Review and Level 2

Jan 2012

NORTH WEST CHARTER
on
Elected Member Development

Municipal Journal and North West Employers

We believe that at the heart of any authority dedicated to meeting the needs of its community will be a commitment to the development of its elected members. Members will be supported and assisted in playing their vital role in modernising local government.

Signing up to the principles of the Charter commits the authority to work towards expressing their commitment in practice by implementing the five key points of the Charter.

- Having a statement of intent
- Ensuring that all members are made aware of learning and development opportunities
- Having a process to identify individual development needs which involves members
- Having an officer allocated to assist members and groups in identifying needs and providing information on resources
- Having a strategy to meet the training and development needs of elected members

Signed by Chief Executive:

Signed by Leader:

Signed by Chair of
Employers' Organisation

History of the Charter and Member Development Strategy

During 1999 the Employers' Organisation agreed a regional strategy on member development. The strategy was crafted by the regional task group which was made up of seven elected members who contributed not only their expertise but their energy and enthusiasm. The three elements of the regional strategy are:

- **gaining commitment**
- **regional provision**
- **involving members**

The concept of a charter was born out of a desire to encourage commitment to member development and to reward those authorities who have demonstrated that commitment. The North West Charter on Member Development will provide tangible evidence of an authority's commitment to long-term investment in the development of its elected members.

The ethos of the Charter is built around the third element of the regional strategy "**involving members**" in their own development. One of the ways of doing this is having a Member Development Group made up of members from all the political groups plus an officer/s responsible for member development. One of the other things that as assessors we hope for, but something which is difficult to measure, is enthusiasm demonstrated by the members and the officer(s). If you have it you're half way there!

The Charter operates at two levels, similar to the Investor in People Award. Firstly, authorities sign a declaration to show their commitment to the principles of the Charter; secondly, following external assessment, authorities are awarded the Charter to show they have demonstrated their commitment in practice and have all the required elements in place.

We are particularly pleased that the Municipal Journal shares our interest in member development and they support the initiative by awarding a special merit prize at our celebration events.

These guidance notes have been prepared to help authorities working towards the Charter understand the process. They will give an indication of the evidence which would support an application for a Charter.

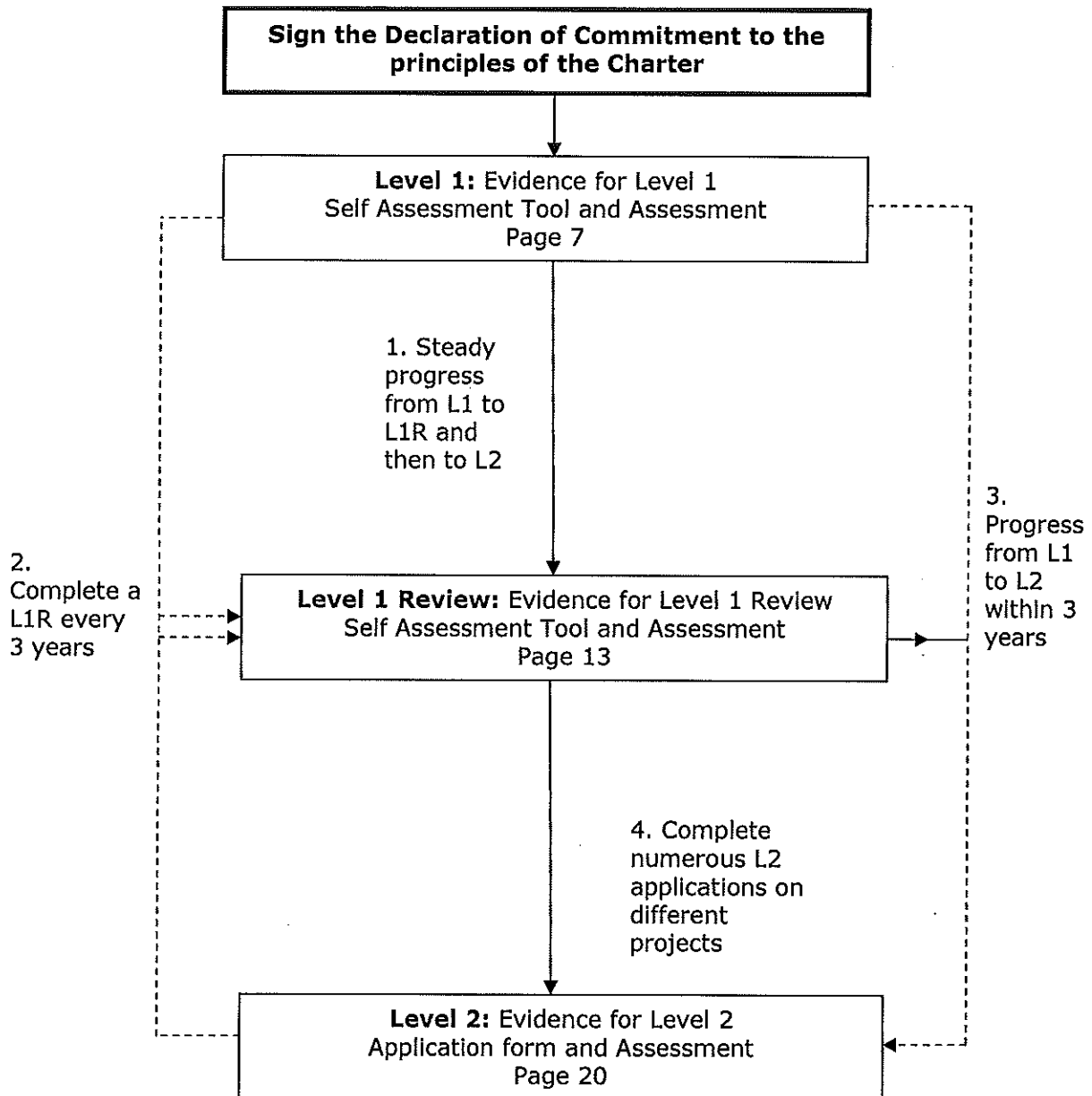
Each authority will have its own approach to developing members, with some having a long tradition of providing excellent development opportunities, and others just starting.

However, irrespective of the starting point, authorities can still sign up by giving their commitment to the principles contained within the Charter. There is no time limit between declaration and assessment. Whilst some authorities may be ready now, others may need time to put the elements in place. The intention of the Charter was to encourage the development of a learning culture, not a quick fix, and therefore Charters will be awarded annually. In addition to the guidance notes, information and advice is available from North West Employers and you can call Lorna Krisson on 0161 214 7121, or e-mail [**lornak@nwemployers.org.uk**](mailto:lornak@nwemployers.org.uk).

Using This Booklet

This booklet has been designed to help you and your authority explore and progress through each level of the Elected Member Development Charter. The content of this booklet covers all three levels of the Charter; Level 1, Level 1 Review and Level 2. It outlines each process for each level, explains the steps involved to work towards receiving an award and supporting information.

The Overall Process



There are four options:

1. Progress from L1, to L1R and L2 taking no longer than 3 years gap between each award.
2. Complete a L1R every 3 years to maintain Charter status.
3. Progress from L1 to L2 within 3 years of receiving L1 award.
4. Complete different applications to receive multiple L2 awards.

Charter Process Level 1

Charter Level 1

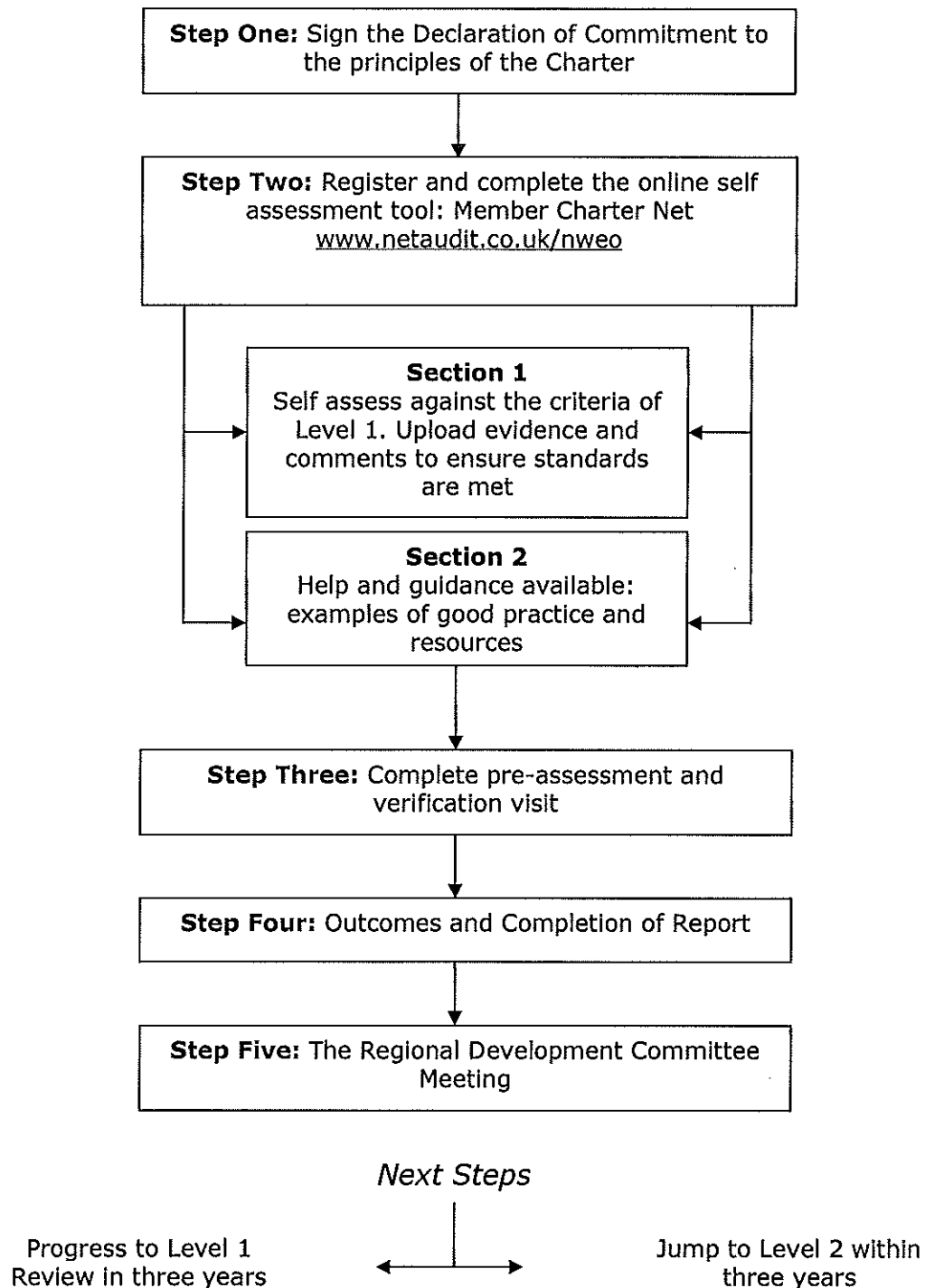
Are You Ready?

Before applying for Level 1, reflect on the following questions to gauge whether you and the authority are ready to begin the process of the Charter assessment.

- Is the council committed to supporting member development and can you evidence this?
- Do you have a member development strategy which is designed and endorsed by members?
- Do you address the personal development needs of individual members with approximately 50% or more of members completing a personal development plan?
- Do you use this information to help establish your training and development approach?
- Do you evaluate all training and use this to inform improvements in your approach?
- Is there officer support allocated to help facilitate and manage?

Charter Level 1

The Level 1 process concentrates on ensuring the **fundamental** methods to aid **member development** are apparent within each authority assessed.



Level 1 Process

Step One

Sign the Declaration of Commitment

Authorities need to sign the Declaration of Commitment to the principles included in the Charter; both the present Leader and Chief Executive must sign the Declaration. This is an important first step as it is intended to promote a healthy discussion on the authority's needs and intention in terms of member development. When you return your signed Declaration, it will be signed by the Chair of the Employers' Organisation and returned to you.

To request a Declaration of Commitment, or for a discussion around the principles of the Charter please contact Lorna Krisson by telephoning 0161 214 7121.

Step Two

Register to the online Member Charter Tool

Each authority needs to complete a pro-forma to register to the online Member Charter Tool. The electronic pro-forma can be found at:

www.nwemployers.org.uk

- ↳ Learning and Sharing Skills
 - ↳ Councillor Development
 - ↳ North West Development Charter
 - ↳ Charter Standards and Process
 - ↳ Level 1 and 1 Review

Once completed, it can be sent to Lorna Krisson by emailing lornak@nwemployers.org.uk. A project for your authority shall then be set up and you shall receive instructions on how to access the tool.

There are four key functions of the tool:

- a) Self Assessment – authorities mark themselves against suitable criteria which incorporates commitment and function of uploading evidence
- b) Action Planning – online planning and reporting function using a traffic light rating against all criteria, help to focus on achievements and prioritise activity

c) Peer Assessment – North West Employers will provide support, as well as volunteers from the region, to oversee the progress and undertake assessment, both face-to-face and remotely via the tool

d) Help and Guidance – each criterion has a description of the type of evidence that is required – under the 'I' button. Examples of good practice, resources and links to national / local websites

Section 1 Work through each criterion marking yourself at a suitable level of achievement. Upload suitable evidence to support your opinions and write comments to expand or use for action planning purposes.

Section 2 Use the 'I' button to learn more about the criterion, find out more about suitable evidence and example resources.

Step Three

Complete Pre-Assessment and Verification Visit

After you have completed all the criteria, the tool says you have achieved at least 50% of the overall standard, and feel you have everything in place then contact:

Lorna Krisson

Knowledge and Network Assistant

E: lornak@nwemployers.org.uk

T: 0161 214 7121

You will be removed access on a temporary basis while we explore the evidence you have uploaded. Once feedback has been given we shall then support your needs and how best to complete the assessment process on an individual basis. An elected member from the Regional Development Committee and an officer from North West Employers will undertake the assessment visit/s. The visit will be in part to check that the authority meets the standards, but also an opportunity to discover different approaches which can be shared as good practice.

Step Four

Outcomes and Completion of Report

The assessors will write a report that will go to the Regional Development Committee or Executive Board for approval.

Step Five

The Regional Development Committee Meeting

The Committee can:

- Confirm successful attainment against the standards
- Defer awarding status and suggest a plan of action to meet the Level 1 standards

Once awarded, a Celebration Event takes place to celebrate authorities' achievements. Additionally, a special merit prize shall be awarded by the Municipal Journal to give one authority an exemplar award.

Level 1 Charter has a lifespan of three years, after which authorities will be asked to submit evidence of how they have sustained and further developed their commitment to member development by undertaking Charter Level 1 Review. Authorities can also progress straight to Level 2 Charter within three years after receiving the Level 1 Award.

How the Assessment Visit Will Run

1. Each visit will include one elected member from the North West Employers Regional Development Committee or Executive Board and an officer from North West Employers.
2. The visit will be arranged in advance and will last for approximately half a day. An officer from North West Employers will liaise with the relevant officer from the authority to make the arrangements.
3. A room and refreshments will need to be made available for the assessment team.
4. During the visit the assessment team will want to speak to:
 - The Leader (or Deputy)
 - The Chief Executive / Chief Officer
 - Leader of the Opposition Group
 - Chair or Portfolio Holder
 - Chair or Member of the Training Group
 - A Newly Elected Member
 - Three randomly Selected Elected Members
 - An Officer/s Responsible for Member Training
5. The interviews are timetabled in 30-45 minutes slots. The interviews can be conducted individually or in small groups based on your requests.
6. At the end of the visit the assessment team will produce a report for the next meeting of the Regional Development Committee. The authority will be advised of the decision immediately after the Committee meeting by telephone and will receive written confirmation and copies of the report.
7. If the assessment team or Regional Development Committee feel that some elements of the evidence are incomplete then the authority will be advised and will be given the opportunity to complete the evidence and be assessed again.
8. If the authority is successful then they will be awarded the Charter and invited to the Celebration Event.
9. Authorities can be assessed at any time during the year, however the Celebration Event is only held once a year.

What We Will Look For in the Level 1 Assessment

During the assessment visit, there are some key areas that we shall be looking for, to take away examples and draw best practice from:

- Commitment to member development demonstrated at all levels across the council
- Members take their development seriously and engage in development available
- Individuals' needs are considered and fed into the overall development strategy with 50% of members completing a PDP
- Dedicated support is provided to co-ordinate and communicate member development activities
- Development activities are evaluated with feedback into overall strategy
- Appropriate resources are allocated to meet development needs

Charter Process Level 1 Review

Charter Level 1 Review

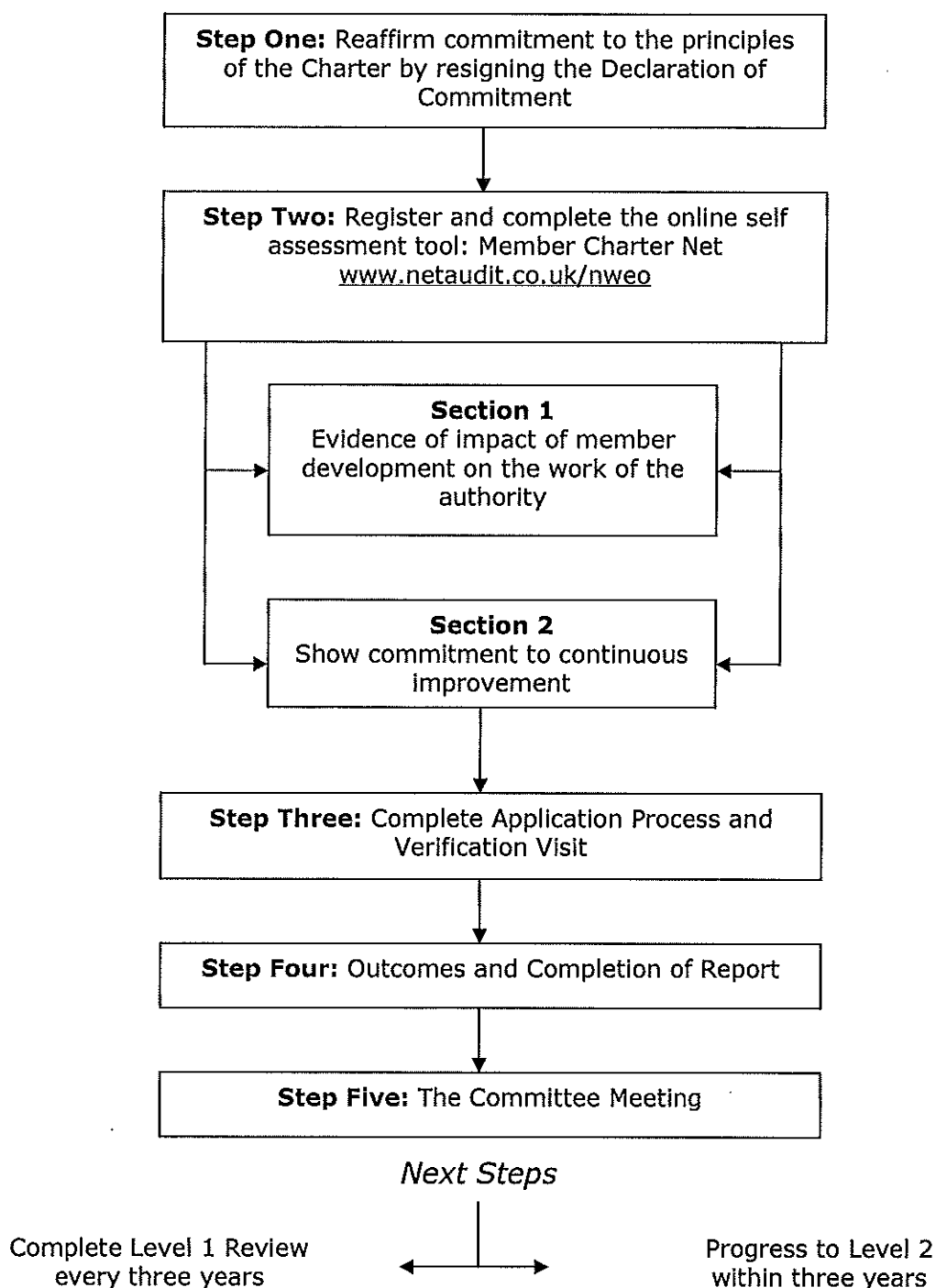
Are You Ready?

Before applying for Level 1 Review, reflect on the following questions to determine whether you and the authority are ready to continue the process of the Charter assessment.

- Is the authority still committed to member development?
- Do members take a lead in promoting development?
- Have at least 75% of members got personal development plans?
- Member development continues to be supported by an appointed officer/s?
- Has the strategy been reviewed at least twice in the last three years?

Charter Level 1 Review

The Level 1 Review process focuses on ensuring the **continued** achievement of supporting **member development** within each authority assessed.



Level 1 Review Process

Step One

Resign the Declaration of Commitment

Authorities need to sign the Declaration of Commitment to the principles included in the Charter; both the present Leader and Chief Executive must sign the Declaration. When you return your signed Declaration, it will be signed by the Chair of the Employers' Organisation and returned to you.

To request a Declaration of Commitment, or for a discussion around the principles of the Charter please contact Lorna Krisson by emailing [**lornak@nwemployers.org.uk**](mailto:lornak@nwemployers.org.uk) or by telephoning 0161 214 7121.

Step Two

Register to the online Member Charter Tool

Each authority needs to complete a pro-forma to register to the online Member Charter Tool. The electronic pro-forma can be found at:

- www.nwemployers.org.uk
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 - ↳ Councillor Development
 - ↳ North West Development Charter
 - ↳ Charter Standards and Process
 - ↳ Level 1 and 1 Review

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- b) Action Planning – online planning and reporting function using a traffic light rating against all criteria, help to focus on achievements and prioritise activity

c) Peer Assessment – NWE will provide support, as well as volunteers from the region, to oversee the progress and undertake assessment, both face-to-face and remotely via the tool

d) Help and Guidance – each criterion has a description of the type of evidence that is required – under the 'I' button. Examples of good practice, resources and links to national / local websites

Section 1 Work through each criterion marking yourself at a suitable level of achievement. Upload suitable evidence to support your opinions and write comments to expand or use for action planning purposes.

Section 2 Use the 'I' button to learn more about the criterion, find out more about suitable evidence and example resources.

Step Three

Complete Verification Visit

After you have completed all the criteria, the tool says you have achieved 100% of the overall standard, and feel you have everything in place then contact:

Lorna Krisson

Knowledge and Network Assistant

E: lornak@nwemployers.org.uk

T: 0161 214 7121

You will be removed access on a temporary basis while we explore the evidence you have uploaded. Once feedback has been given we shall then support your needs and how best to complete the assessment process on an individual basis. An elected member from the Regional Development Committee and an officer from North West Employers will undertake the assessment visit/s. The visit will be in part to check that the authority meets the standards, but also an opportunity to discover different approach which can be shared as good practice.

Step Four

Outcomes and Completion of Report

The assessors will write a report that will go to the Regional Development Committee or Executive Board for approval.

Step Five

The Regional Development Committee Meeting

The Committee can:

- Confirm successful attainment against the standards
- Defer awarding status and suggest a plan of action to meet the Level 1 Review standards

Once awarded, a Celebration Event takes place to celebrate authorities' achievements.

Level 1 Review Charter has a lifespan of three years, after which authorities will be asked to re-join the tool where their previous application will be available to review and update. Authorities do have the option to progress on to Level 2 within three years after achieving Level 1 Review.

How the Assessment Visit Will Work

1. Each visit will include one elected member from the North West Employers Regional Development Committee or Executive Board and an officer from North West Employers.
2. The visit will be arranged in advance and will last for approximately half a day. An officer from North West Employers will liaise with the relevant officer from the authority to make the arrangements.
3. A room and refreshments will need to be made available for the assessment team.
4. During the visit the assessment team would like to speak to:
 - The Leader (or Deputy)
 - The Chief Executive / Chief Officer
 - Leader of the Opposition Group
 - Chair or Portfolio Holder
 - Chair or Member of the Training Group
 - A Newly Elected Member
 - Three randomly Selected Elected Members
 - An Officer/s Responsible for Member Training
5. The interviews are timetabled in 30-45 minutes slots. The interviews can be conducted individually or in small groups based on your requests.
6. At the end of the visit the assessment team will produce a report for the next meeting of the Regional Development Committee. The assessment team will inform the authority of their decision as soon as possible prior to the Committee meeting. Shortly after the Committee meeting, the authority will receive written confirmation and copies of the report.
7. If the assessment team or Regional Development Committee feel that some elements of the evidence are incomplete then the authority will be advised and will be given the opportunity to complete the evidence and be assessed again.
8. If the authority is successful then they will be awarded the Charter and invited to the Celebration Event.
9. Authorities can be assessed at any time during the year, however the Celebration Event is only held once a year.

What We Will Look For in the Level 1 Assessment

During the assessment visit, there are some key areas that we shall be looking for, to take away examples and draw best practice from:

- Continued commitment to member development demonstrated at all levels across the council
- An established member development strategy to support organisational needs and overall strategy
- Clarity of subject area and methods of delivery based on member needs assessments
- 75% of members complete a PDP
- Clear communication strategy which supports member development
- A method of evaluating learning and development activities and continuous improvement

Charter Process Level 2

Charter Level 2

Are You Ready?

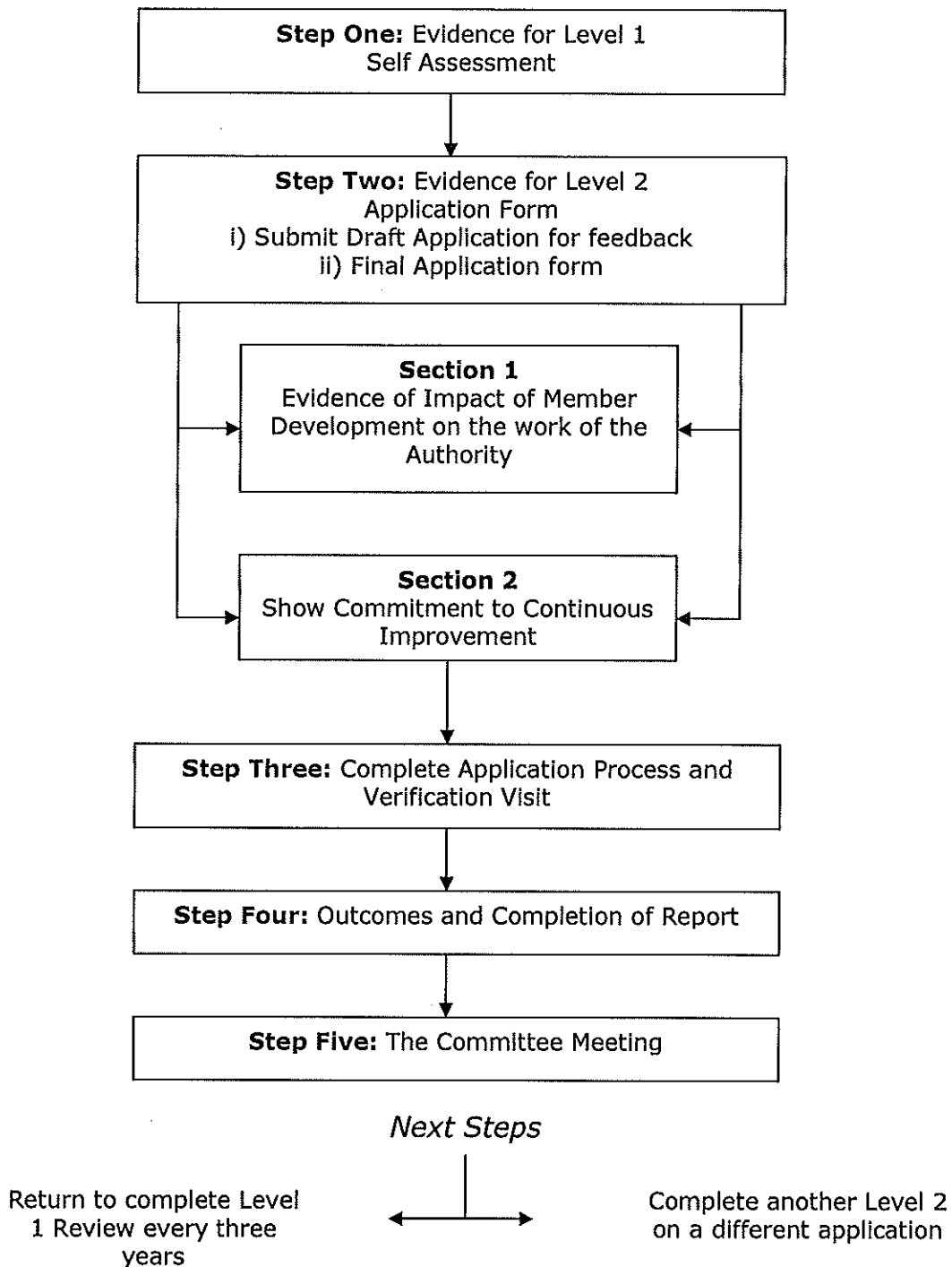
Before applying for Level 2, reflect on the following questions to gauge whether you and the authority are ready to begin the process of Level 2 Charter assessment.

- Has the authority got an embedded culture in the organisation that is supportive of member development?
- Does the authority and its officers have the additional skills and capacity to deal with the more flexible criteria and format in Level 2?
- Has the authority looked at the level and quality of available evidence before choosing the topic for the application?
- Has the authority considered whether it will have sufficient evidence of outcomes available by the assessment date?
- Have you got other departments, services and partners involved?
- Have you got political buy-in from all parties?

Charter Level 2

The Level 2 process concentrates on the **impact**, but there is also the opportunity to briefly showcase **continuous improvement**.

If the authority wants to apply for Level 2, the process is as follows:



Level 2 Process

Step One

Evidence for Level 1 or Level 1 Review: Self Assessment

Undertake a self assessment to check that you have maintained your charter status. Provide evidence under each of the five key points, with a storyboard to tie the points together.

There will be a pre-assessment visit to verify this evidence. This will be a meeting for three elected members and an officer from the authority and will take around 1½ hours (preferably members who are not directly involved in member development or part of the Executive/Cabinet).

If the authority was re-accredited for Level 1 or Level 1 Review the previous year then this self assessment stage is not necessary, please jump to Step Two.

Step Two

Evidence for Level 2: Application Form

Complete the Charter Review Application Form (see page 29).

Does your entry show:

- Section 1 The impact of member development on the work of the local authority and the community.
- Section 2 That the authority is committed to continuous improvement in member development?

Section 1: Provide evidence of impact of member development on the work of the local authority

There are three main sections on the application form:

- **Issue** for the authority and community: what was the community issue that you decided to tackle eg Corporate Parenting, Neighbourhood Working, Recycling, Communicating with hard to reach groups using IT and Transformation Agenda.
- **Member learning and development:** what took place and how did this link to the issue? Did the learners learn what was

expected, how did it all link to the corporate priorities, did you make any changes to anything because of the review?

- **Overall impact** on the community, the members and the authority: what changed in the community because of the member learning and development? What did the authority learn from the whole process?

Section 2: Show commitment to continuous improvement

The authority will also be expected to show their commitment to **continuous improvement** in member learning and development.

- Demonstrate progress on the 'continuous improvement' issues identified at the original assessment - evidence from Level 1 Award.
- Review processes for member development, eg Member Development Group to review strategy and agree new priorities.
- Can clearly articulate where the authority wants to improve their practice in the future.

Step Three Complete Application Process

The electronic application form can be found at:

www.nwemployers.org.uk
↳ Learning and Sharing Skills
 ↳ Councillor Development
 ↳ North West Development Charter
 ↳ Charter Standards and Process

Once completed, it needs to be sent to Lorna Krisson by emailing [**lornak@nwemployers.org.uk**](mailto:lornak@nwemployers.org.uk).

After the application form has been received North West Employers will arrange an initial discussion with the authority. If there is sufficient evidence from the form, then North West Employers will proceed to arrange an assessment visit. If there are queries arising from the form then North West Employers may need to get a better understanding or more information from the authority.

An assessment visit will be arranged to verify the evidence provided in the application form. An officer and an elected member from North West Employers will act as assessors. The assessors may ask to

interview members of the public or people from outside bodies as well as elected members and staff. Each assessment process will be agreed with the authority and will be designed around the specific project.

Step Four Outcomes

The assessors will write a report that will go to the Regional Development Committee or Executive Board for approval.

Step Five The Committee Meeting

The Committee can:

- Confirm successful attainment against the original standards.
- Defer awarding status and suggest a plan of action to meet the Level 2 standards.

Once awarded, a Celebration Event takes place to celebrate authorities' achievements. Additionally, a special merit prize shall be awarded by the Municipal Journal to give one authority an exemplar award.

Support Offered by North West Employers

Throughout your Charter process we are dedicated to providing support and guidance. We offer:

- Guidance prior to application to assess 'readiness' for progressing your project to Level 2 Charter Status
- Workshops and sharing events with other authorities working towards Level 2
- Peer support from authorities who have been awarded Level 2

If you require any further support or have any ideas that would be useful for the whole region then please do let Lorna Krisson know by emailing [**lornak@nwemployers.org.uk**](mailto:lornak@nwemployers.org.uk).

What We Will Look For in the Level 2 Assessment

Charter Level 2 does not have set criteria like Charter Level 1. Level 2 looks at whether the authority can demonstrate that the community has benefited from member development on a specific area. Each application for Level 2 is different, and therefore the assessment will be tailored in each case. However, there are some general things the assessors are looking for in Level 2. This is a guide to what is required to make a successful Level 2 application, under three headings:

- What we are looking for with the project or example
- What we are looking for with the use of evidence
- What we are looking for in the community and authority impacts

What we are looking for with the project or example

The application demonstrates that:

- The work done relates to an issue that directly affects the community, and (ideally) is recognised by the community.
- Development of members has been explicitly targeted to address the member development needs identified around the community issue.
- Members recognise which elements of learning and development were directly related to the issue.
- Members can identify changes in their skills, knowledge and expertise on the issue before and after member development took place.
- There has been an improvement on the community issues, and there are clear links between the member development done, and the outcomes, which are recognised by members themselves.

What we are looking for with the use of evidence

- Statements and assertions must be backed up by evidence, including references for the sources of evidence.
- A range of different types of evidence is provided from a range of different sources, e.g. a mix of examples or case studies, statistics, and documentary evidence, including material from members, officers, residents, and partners.
- Evidence is provided for the situation for the authority and the community before the work took place, and afterwards.

- All evidence provided stands up to a reasonable challenge from someone not involved in the work.

What we are looking for in the community and authority impacts

- Community and authority outcomes have been experienced by the community, and (ideally) are recognised by the community.
- Any changes to strategy, policy, procedures and structures have led to a practical difference for the community.
- The impacts are advanced enough to have resolved the original issues, or can be shown to have achieved significant milestones.
- Outcomes described in the application are recognised by a range of stakeholders.

CHARTER PROCESS LEVEL TWO APPLICATION FORM

GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING THE ON-LINE FORM

1. The Application Form will begin with the first field highlighted. Please treat all fields as case sensitive and use upper and lower case as appropriate.
2. Use the TAB key to move through the fields. *(This key is situated above the Caps Lock key and is usually marked by two horizontal arrows pointing in opposite directions).*

NOTE:

Submissions should be sent to **lornak@nwemployers.org.uk**

Should you experience any difficulties in submitting this form, please contact Lorna Krisson on 0161 214 7121.

CHARTER REVIEW PROCESS APPLICATION FORM

About You and Your Organisation – to be completed by an officer on behalf of the organisation. (Members **do not** need to complete individual copies)

Name of your Organisation

Please ensure that this is correct as this name will be used on all PR and event related materials

Title

First name

Surname

Designation

Department

Department address

Telephone

Fax

Mobile

E-mail

Charter awarded in year:

General checklist for organisations

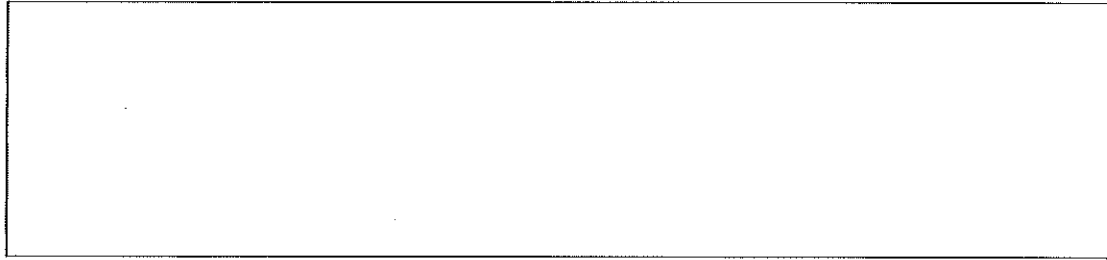
Does your entry show:

- 1 The impact of member development on the work of the local authority and the community?
- 2 That the authority is committed to continuous improvement within member development?

Description of your organisation

Please give a brief description of your organisation; for example, number of members, political make-up of the authority, aims and objectives of the authority.

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Section One - Authority and the Community

In completing this section we have some materials that may be to use to you in our 'Helping You on Your Way' section on our website. We have the 'Making a Difference' evaluation toolkit, 'North West Charter Level 2 Case Studies' booklet containing first-hand accounts from councillors and officers, as well as some useful documents from other authorities who have completed the process.

www.nwemployers.org.uk

- ↳ Learning and Sharing Skills
 - ↳ Councillor Development
 - ↳ North West Development Charter
 - ↳ Charter Standards and Process
 - ↳ Helping You on Your Way

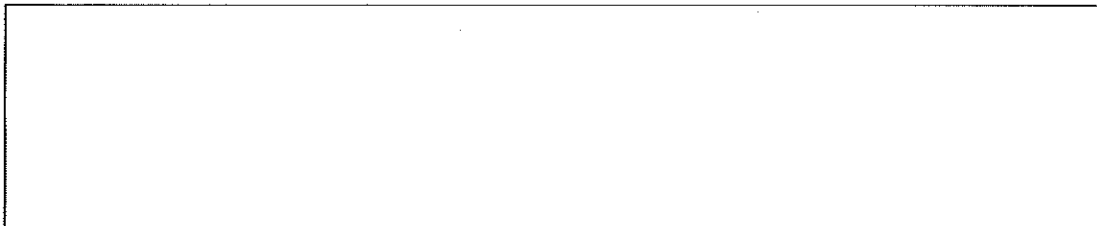
1. Issues for the authority and community

- What were the issues for the community and your authority that you wanted to tackle at the beginning? Please give evidence of these issues, as experienced by the community.

Note: For guidance on what we mean by 'evidence', please refer to 'Practical Lesson No 1' on page 10 of the toolkit.

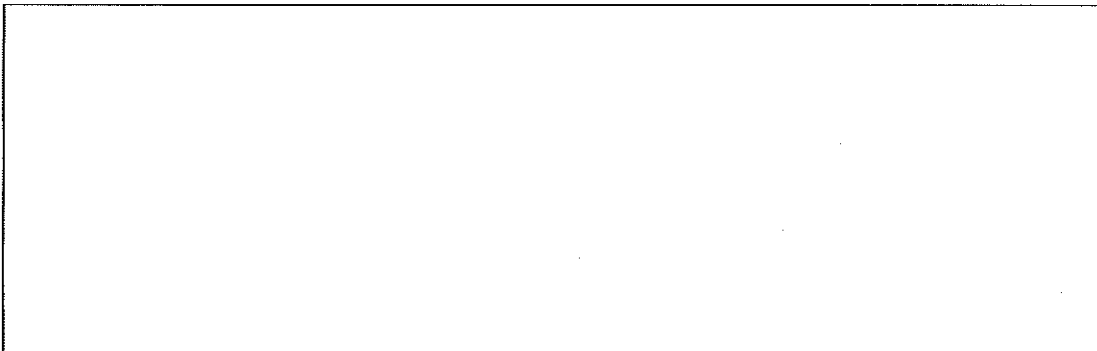
2. Member learning and development

- Describe the member learning and development that took place in relation to these community issues, eg workshops, mentoring, video, role play, project work.
- How was the learning and development designed to meet the member learning and development needs.
- How did you ensure the quality of the learning intervention?
- Tell us about what people learnt with a clear 'before and after' picture e.g. Before learning I could not do 'X', and I did not do 'Y'. Then I had 'Z' learning and development (based on my needs assessment). This then enabled me to take 'X' actions, which have helped recycling in 'Y' ways.



3. Overall Impact

- Describe the overall impact on the community, the members and the authority.
- What changed in the community because of the member learning and development?
- What did the authority learn from the whole process?



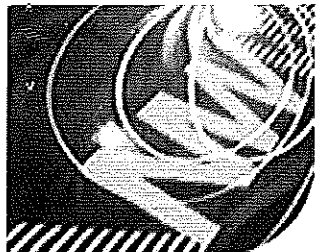
Note: If you didn't have a clear idea about the outcomes until after the development had taken place, then tell us about the learning that emerged – check the 'Suck it and see' section on page 27 of the toolkit.

Section Two – Continuous Improvement

Continuous Improvement

Give examples of how the authority is committed to continuous improvement with member development.

- In reviewing the evidence from your last assessment visit, what have been the most significant improvements?
- What are your aspirations/hopes for the next three years?



In association with

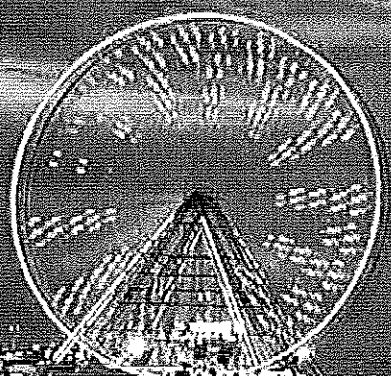


Level 02

North West Member Charter Case Studies

Contents

Introduction	03
Blackpool Council	
Licensing	04
Chorley Borough Council	
Neighbourhood Working	08
Fylde Borough Council	
E-communications	14
Halton Borough Council	
Competency Programme	22
Knowsley MBC	
Strategic and Local Waste Management	28
Warrington Borough Council	
Corporate Parenting	36
Frequently Asked Questions	42



Introduction

In order to achieve Level 2, the 'exemplar' level of the North West Charter for Elected Member Development, an Authority must provide evidence of continued achievement at Level 1 and also evidence in two distinct additional areas:

- The Impact of Member Development on the Community
- Commitment to Improvement

The toolkit 'Making a Difference' goes even further to support councils to review their practice and evaluate the impact of the Members development on the communities that they represent.

You will find that the six attached Level 2 Charter case studies tell a little about the councils and a lot about the journeys they took to achieve their goals. These journeys range from the very first councils who dipped their toes in the water back in early 2007 to the more recent achievers in 2009.

All without exception agreed that working for Level 2 had not been easy, but the outcomes had made the hard work worth it in the end. As they actively raised their game they found many positive and unexpected spin-offs with one development activity quite often triggering another.

You will see from their work that once they began to think 'outside the box' life became a little easier. They were able to recognise how their different ways of learning like the interactive workshops, interviews, e-learning, coaching, mentoring and site visits had enabled them to produce creative outcomes.

When asked to reflect on why they thought they had been successful, council's came up with the following 'Golden Threads' for success:

- Trust and credibility between members and officers
- The 'will', drive and energy to make things happen
- Buy-in from Members and officers
- The aspirational nature of the organisation for achieving Level 2
- Having a Member led cross-party Political Forum
- Learning what is 'fit for purpose' for the culture of the organisation

- Diverse evidence gathering techniques e.g. nuggets of information collected in ad-hoc conversations
- Space and capacity in the workforce at the time of commencing the application e.g. a year when there were no elections

It is important to note that they all faced stiff challenges when identifying and collecting evidence to demonstrate that the council's investment in member development had had a direct and beneficial impact on the work of the local authority and the community. As you will see they successfully met those challenges by providing evidence of statistical information, resident quotes, before and after situations, testimonies from partners and stakeholders.

So far there have been 6 councils who have achieved Charter Level 2 they are:

- Blackpool Council
- Chorley Borough Council
- Halton Borough Council
- Fylde Borough Council
- Knowsley MBC
- Warrington Borough Council

We hope that you will find the Case Studies a useful resource in helping you to decide if you are ready to apply for Charter Level 2 and supportive in helping you to identify a topic / issue to tackle in your journey to achieving Charter Level 2.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (NWIEP) for their continued support for the Charter at Level 2 and their investment in developing exemplar standards of member development in the North West.

Summary

Blackpool Council was one of the first local authorities to apply for the North West Member Development Charter Level 2 which it achieved in March 2007. Their main challenge was how to demonstrate that member training had had a direct impact on the local community.

Blackpool Council attained the Level 1 Charter in 2002. In the following 5 years, member development had moved on considerably with some major initiatives having been undertaken.

The application concentrated on the training that they undertook to prepare for the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 which transferred responsibility for liquor licensing from the Magistrates Court to local authorities.

As Blackpool has one of the highest number of licensed premises per local authority in the country and it was anticipated that thousands of licences would be issued in a 9 month period, extensive training had to be provided for all councillors who would sit on the Licensing Committee and associated panels. It represented some major and significant challenges for the authority in terms of knowledge and experience and volume of workload.

The Fire Service directly linked the training undertaken to members' performance on the panels:

“The hearings seemed very fair and the panel listened to all parties involved. The training they've had shows through, particularly with the chair who had a good working knowledge of what he should be doing.”

Background to the Council

Blackpool is a seaside town in Lancashire, situated along the coast of the Irish Sea. It has a population of 142,900, making it the fourth-largest settlement in North West England behind Manchester, Liverpool and Warrington. It is also the fourth most densely populated local authority district of England & Wales outside Greater London and it is a major centre of tourism.

Blackpool Council is currently controlled by the Conservative Party with 27 councillors, followed by the Labour Party with 12 and the Liberal Democrats with 3.

Who was involved in the Member Development Programme?

A diverse range of people were involved; councillors, the Member Services Team, residents, stakeholders – Police, Fire Service, Hotel Association, solicitors, Licensees – the Assistant Democratic Services Manager, the Member Services Working Group.

Key Learning for other councils applying for Level 2

- Consult with members to identify a suitable member development initiative and one that will have a positive and direct community impact.
- Identify what learning is required, desired outcomes and delivery structure – this needs to be relevant and provide value for money.
- Adopt a methodical approach to the consultation process. Ensure all stakeholders have been identified and that appropriate methods of consultation are used.
- Throughout the entire process, focus on how impact on the community will be measured and proved.
- Identify which roles will be undertaken by officers or members, to ensure an organised and effective approach.

Approach to the Level 2 process

The cross-party Member Services Working Group decided that their application would concentrate primarily on the training provided to Licensing Committee members and how this impacted on the community, with the remainder of the application addressing training initiatives across the board. They examined the statutory requirements of the new legislation and how this related to Blackpool in particular.

The authority set the following criteria for success:

- The majority of hearings to be heard within prescribed time limits.
- The number of appeals made (on the basis of poor decision-making or hearing procedures).
- Feedback from Members that they considered they had received a full range of development support for their role.
- Strong working relationships between Members across parties, as well as with Officers and relevant stakeholders such as licensees, the Police and Fire Authority.
- Blackpool to be seen as an example of best practice from authorities with high numbers of licensed premises.
- Favourable publicity and comment from the local trade, community and other sources.

Learning delivery was carried out using a variety of formats, e.g. seminars, guidance notes, site visits, checklists, conferences, job shadowing. This was part of a wider innovative learning environment which included focus groups; leadership programmes; attendance at select committees;

mentoring; I'm a Councillor – Get me out of here; ICT learning and support; ICT allowance; Members' portal; ward enquiry system; website for councillors; ICT drop-in surgery; one-to-one training; and ECDL.

The major challenge was how to approach the consultation process, to ensure feedback received directly related to the council's requirements. A good working relationship with other council departments was vital, as they provided information relating to licensing issues within the town that they would not otherwise have had access to. It was important to obtain hard facts and figures – information on the structured training programme arranged, timescales, members and officers involved and associated costs. The Licensing section provided contact details of relevant stakeholders and pulled together a questionnaire about the licensing process. They were then able to include questions relating to training undertaken by members and how this impacted on member performance during licensing hearings. Great care had to be taken with the wording of the questionnaire, to ensure responders commented on processes and performance, not on individual outcomes of appeals.

Also, information was provided on the number of licensing hearings arranged and heard and how this impacted on councillors' time.

A focus group made up of councillors on the Licensing Committee gathered feedback on training provided, how it had assisted them in their roles and future training requirements.

A written questionnaire sent to stakeholders provided an overall impression of the Licensing process and member 'performance'. However, the questionnaire had limited success with some issues being difficult to pinpoint, as responders were selective in which questions they answered. One-to-one interviews were therefore undertaken with selected stakeholders; via the telephone with the Chairman of the Hotel Association and face-to-face with the police and fire service. This enabled direct questions to be asked and helped to highlight important issues relating to panel hearing performance. Feedback from these stakeholders was fed back to the focus group and formed the basis for further analysis of training undertaken.

Outcomes and impact

The effectiveness of the learning was assessed in a number of ways: feedback from Licensing Focus Group; consultation with external stakeholders; low number of appeals; visit from Westminster Council; Parliamentary Scrutiny Council reports; comments from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport; editorial article in licensed trade journal.

By gathering feedback from a variety of sources, an overall impression was gauged about the Licensing process, panel hearings and panel members. Other areas of member training also experienced an 'uplift', with successful methods of evaluation extending outwards. Outcomes and impacts could be measured in the following ways:

Individual Impact

For officers, the whole Level 2 process was a steep learning curve, which forced them to assess how they properly evaluated training that had been undertaken by members. The accepted use of 'smiley' sheets following training

sessions was no longer acceptable. Instead, alternative in-depth methods of evaluation, such as gathering feedback from others involved with the training process as a whole and its outcomes were implemented. The success of training sessions had to be evaluated much more vigorously to ensure value for money had been achieved.

Members were able to reflect on licensing and their 'performance' via discussion in the focus groups, whilst consultation with the stakeholders enabled them to be involved in the process.

Members felt that they were able to give their constituents more information and more constructive suggestions on how to deal with problem issues, e.g. noise and disruption from licensed premises. They were able to suggest grounds for appeal which were more specific and less emotive.

“One stakeholder also commented on how members' comprehension of issues developed as time progressed. This impacted not only on decisions reached, which directly affected premises within the town, but also the speed at which panels were able to deal with hearings, therefore enabling the authority to meet the statutory time limits in place.”

The Fire Service directly linked the training undertaken to members' performance on the panels:

"The hearings seemed very fair and the panel listened to all parties involved. The training they've had shows through, particularly with the chair who had a good working knowledge of what he should be doing".

Members mentioned the introduction of a new policy; a 'saturation zone' in the town centre (approved by the Council in January). This means that, in future, new licences will only be granted if the applicant could prove that their venue would not add to the alcohol-fuelled violence.

Members felt that they were equipped by the training to give their constituents information that would help them raise a relevant objection, e.g. provisions about children helped prevent an application for an off-licence near a school.

Members are frequently approached about licensing issues, as many of them have hotels and guesthouses in their wards.

Their knowledge of licensing legislation has meant that they can informally resolve a lot of issues. They can explain to residents how they can object effectively and how they can monitor if the objection did not succeed.

Community Impact

Measuring the direct impact on the community was the most difficult issue to address. The council analysed the low number of negative news reports resulting from licensing decisions, positive comments made by key stakeholders who had observed the process over many months, the low number of appeals; 100% of panel hearings being heard within the statutory time limits and how local people showed a much greater understanding of their rights to make representations.

The Blackpool Evening Gazette helped as it reported that alcohol-related violence in the town centre was down by 40% (January 2007). The number of drink-fuelled violent incidents was down from 247 in December 2005 to 153 in December 2006.

Members and others like the Police Service and Fire Service, were working together effectively to make the legislation work, e.g. a Night Safe initiative (a multi-agency inspection team).

Organisation Impact

Constructive communication with other council departments was a key outcome. For example, whilst information obtained from the Health and Safety Team did not feed directly into the submission, it provided Democratic Services officers with more of an insight into the issues. This helped with the way information was pulled together and was invaluable during the Level 2 interviews, as the information gave them the background to answer many of the questions. Working alongside the Licensing department to produce the questionnaire for stakeholders, meant they could gather information on both licensing panel processes and the training of members.

One stakeholder also commented on how members' comprehension of issues developed as time progressed. This impacted not only on decisions reached, which directly affected premises within the town, but also the speed at which panels were able to deal with hearings, therefore enabling the authority to meet the statutory time limits in place.

In addition to the direct work undertaken on Licensing, there were positive 'spin-offs' for member development. Focus groups were set up for the Development Control Committee and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. As a result of these focus groups, modular training sessions now run prior to each Development Control Committee and issues related to Overview and Scrutiny addressed and actioned.

What could have been done better?

As Blackpool was one of the first Authorities to go through the Level 2 process, it is difficult to identify what could have been done better. The whole process was a huge learning curve and it was very much a 'suck it and see' approach, as they learned hand in hand with the North West Employers Organisation. What it has done, is to enable them to reflect on how evaluation is carried out and value for money achieved. There is now much more of a focus on intended outcomes and impact of training during the Strategy process and a long

term vision of what they need to focus on if they wish to retain the Level 2 on review.

Continuous Improvement

Blackpool has not stood still as their approach is to invest in learning; invest in technology; enable Members to maximise opportunities and resources; invest in knowledge building. The Member Services Working Group is at the forefront of continuous improvement

They are due to be re assessed for the Charter in the next couple of years and are instigating further methods of member support across the board. Current initiatives include a new 360 degree assessment process for members, improved member enquiry system and building relations and working practices between officers and members, all with the end aim of creating further positive impact on the community across all areas of councillors' work.

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Summary

When Chorley Council introduced neighbourhood working they wanted to ensure that Members were fully engaged and informed throughout the process. A Member development package was delivered which included ward walks; neighbourhood issue related learning sessions; a boroughwide tour for the big neighbourhood picture; and localised neighbourhood area tours with ward councillors and partners. Take up was excellent and building on the culture of learning within the organisation, led to Chorley achieving Level 2 of the Member Development Charter.

In 2008 the CPA Inspection team commended the council:

“The Council has strengthened the capacity of managers and councillors through targeted development. The Council's cross party approach to Councillor development focuses on all aspects of training, development and support. Councillors have personal development plans and feel that they receive the development they need to be effective in their roles. This means that the Council has in place measures to ensure that leadership strength is maintained and improved.”

Acting on recommendations of the Scrutiny Review, the Executive committed to the introduction of Neighbourhood Working in Chorley. Seven Neighbourhood Areas were created which reflected the urban and rural mix of the Borough. Neighbourhood Working in Chorley is about action on the ground – seven virtual teams from across the Council which work together with partners, the County and Parish Councils and local communities to take action to improve areas.

Following the introduction of Neighbourhood Working in 2008 / 09 a substantial programme of development was created and successfully delivered to Councillors.

Applying for Charter Level 2 based on this programme was decided on at a fairly early stage. Chorley had been due for their Charter Level 1 three year reassessment, but the Member Support Working Group felt that their member development had advanced to the stage that they could demonstrate a strong culture of learning which could earn them Charter Level 2.

There was a strong energy and enthusiasm for the initiative. Members wanted to improve their communities and could see that positive Neighbourhood Working was a useful way to do this.

Background to the Council

Chorley Council is a district Council in central Lancashire with a population of 104,800. The area has an urban centre – the town of Chorley, and a rural fringe of villages and smaller communities served by Parish Councils.

There are 47 Councillors with a political split of 27 Conservatives, 15 Labour, 3 Liberal Democrats and 2 Independent Members.

In recent years the Council has been transformed:

- Achieving Beacon Awards in 2008 and 2009
- Moving from fair to excellent at CPA in 2008
- Being one of only two district Councils in the country to achieve 4 out of 4 for Organisational Assessment (Use of Resources and Managing Performance) under the new CAA in 2009.

Who was involved in the Member Development Programme?

Member development and training is led by the Council's Member Support Working Group, a small cross party group dedicated to councillor development and chaired by an Executive Member. This Group along with democratic services and policy staff led on the development strategy and introduction of a development programme for Neighbourhood Working for all Councillors. Key Executive Members, Directors and senior officers were also involved.

The programme aimed at maximising the opportunity for Councillor involvement and learning was set against a backdrop of Neighbourhood Officers undertaking detailed local consultation with local residents and close working with partners like the Police, Housing Associations, the PCT, the Voluntary and Community Sector, and County and Parish Councils.

Key Learning for other councils applying for Level 2

- Choose a topic that can generate enthusiasm and commitment from a wider group of Members for a sustained period of time.
- Gain senior management and all party commitment to applying for a higher level award for Member development is key, as is an enthusiastic Member Development Support Group. Member development needs to be high profile enough and valued enough to get buy in from all. The assessment and verification process is in depth and very challenging.

- Take advice on offer from support in the region and read the Toolkit!
- You can use the act of making a Level 2 application as a driver to ensure people stick to the delivery of the Member Development Programme.
- Be creative in your approach. Some of the best evidence is not statistical or survey based but is what Councillors, residents and partners have to say. Councillor comments after training events (and not ones written on the 'happy sheets') are often the most poignant, and the most valuable.
- Ensure Councillors on the Member Development Group commit their time to supporting a Level 2 project.

Approach to the Level 2 Process

Neighbourhood Working was a key project in the Council's Corporate Strategy. The Council had invested significantly in the departmental structure to deliver Neighbourhood Working. The Member Development programme was a supplementary programme to support Councillors in their community champion role and they were very enthusiastic and keen to participate. They knew when Neighbourhood Working came along that it was an ideal topic and – most importantly – one that would add real value to the organisation.

Members said that they wanted to achieve some of the following objectives from the programme:

- A better awareness of issues and a wider understanding of the extent of the issues in their neighbourhoods.
- To learn from solutions in place elsewhere across the borough.
- An understanding of the roles and responsibilities of partners (Police, housing associations, PCT, Parish and County Council).
- An understanding of the funding sources available from outside the Council

Democratic Services work closely with the Member Support Working Group. They know what kind of learning goes down best with their colleagues – getting out and about, talking to partners, making links, practical learning that helps Councillors do their job is always going to be more popular than chalk and talk sessions – although they too have their place.

Chorley's programme was developed with local Members. The main driver was not best practice from elsewhere, but what would work best in Chorley and what would maintain Member enthusiasm and involvement whilst still delivering the development needed.

“It's great to walk round my ward with other Ward Members from other political parties, knowing we are all working hard to make our neighbourhood a better place to live in and it doesn't matter which side you are on” **Quote from a Councillor on Ward Walk**

The development programme took place over 12 months and was delivered in five stages:

Stage 1: Ward Walks. In late Summer 2008 all 47 Councillors were invited to take part in structured ward walks with the Corporate Director (Neighbourhoods) and key neighbourhood staff. Councillors set the agenda, chose which areas / issues they visited and expressed their aspirations for development and change.

Stage 2: Personal Development Plan (PDP) Reviews. In the Autumn of 2008 all Councillors undertook PDP interviews and reviews – resulting in an impressive 100% of councillors with PDPs. The outcome from these along with any learning issues identified through the Ward Walks process helped develop a programme of neighbourhood related development sessions.

Quote from Chorley's Council Leader, Councillor Peter Goldsworthy expressing commitment and encouragement to the continued learning of all Councillors:

“nothing stands still, new initiatives, changes in partnership roles, changes in funding and inspection regimes means we must all commit to ongoing learning – through a whole variety of means – site visits, briefings, formal and informal training sessions, networking – it never stops.”

Stage 3: Neighbourhood Development Programme. From Autumn 2008 to mid 2009 the programme was delivered for Councillors using the existing monthly learning session which is timetabled into the member calendar. Sessions included:

- Accessing Ward Resources
- Strategic Housing Issues
- Planning in Practice
- Vulnerable Families
- MATAC (Multi Agency Community Safety Initiative)
- Dog Fouling Issues and Enforcement
- Understanding the LSP

Stage 4: Action Plans and Bus Tour. In Spring 2009 the seven draft Neighbourhood Action Plans were launched with a tour of the Borough for Councillors to look at the wider picture of neighbourhood issues; focussing on problem solving – potential solutions and potential funding sources.



“ It’s really useful to get everyone on site. It puts issues in perspective and now with all key partners on the tour we have the necessary information and can come up with solutions or actions – or sometimes find the route to other funding ”

Quote from Councillor on Neighbourhood Tour

Stage 5: Neighbourhood Tours with Partners. In Summer 2009 Councillors met in their relevant Neighbourhood Area Groups to sign off Action Plans and plan a Neighbourhood Tour of their area with other Councillors at Parish and County level, with key partners and agencies.

Outcomes and Impact

The whole approach was project managed by Democratic Services staff who, with the support and guidance of the Member Support Working Group, promoted and evaluated the training and the completion of all Councillor PDPs. The programme was timed to move at the same pace as the implementation of Neighbourhood Working – slowing down for wider local consultation and speeding up as funding for projects was allocated. At every stage Members built on their existing knowledge and skills and their enthusiasm and commitment to their role was strengthened.

The involvement of partners was fundamental to the success of the programme. The Neighbourhood Working Steering Group was a multi agency group which led the process of Implementation of Neighbourhood Working. Partners were kept informed about ward walk outcomes, helped form Neighbourhood Action Plan priorities and then took part in Neighbourhood tours to answer questions on their actions locally.

Outcomes could be measured in the following ways:

Individual Impact

The learning for most Councillors was not about their own ward area – most Councillors knew their wards inside out, but about new learning which was achieved by:

- Looking at ward problems / issues directly with officers on site, learning about solutions which had worked elsewhere and understanding the context and size of similar problems across the Borough
- Hearing about potential funding sources beyond the limited Council budgets available

- Understanding partner roles and responsibilities – particularly in complex land ownership situations
- Understanding how working together with partners on site can create new ideas and bring influence to resolve problems.
- Learning about their new neighbourhood teams of officers and how they were tackling issues across the Borough
- Understanding and being realistic in their expectations of what Neighbourhood Working can deliver for communities

Generally Councillors have strengthened their roles as ward representatives and community champions with greater understanding and knowledge about neighbourhood issues borough wide and how they can influence change.

Knowledge and understanding of neighbourhood issues benefits Members and their decision making role as their understanding of local issues improves their strategic thinking, their ability to scrutinise more effectively and make decisions and their regulatory roles.

There are outcomes from 20 Ward Walks, a Borough tour, seven Neighbourhood tours to show the difference the programme has made – and these all have an impact on those local communities. Members really valued their on site experiences.

Specific Impacts of the Development were found in the following:

Accessing Ward Resources

Every session resulted in a flurry of grant applications as councillors linked community projects to funding pots.

MATACs

Understanding how Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC) worked in maintaining community safety saw the establishment of mini MATAC's in a number of neighbourhood areas to assist in monitoring crime and anti social behaviour.

Dog Fouling

An understanding of enforcement issues has been key to increased prosecutions.

Weeks of Action

Members are involved in their wards on “weeks of action”. These are co-ordinated multi-agency activities that provide things like community skips, help and advice to improve residents access to benefits, waste management etc.

Decision Making

Members are better equipped to undertake their other decision making roles. They have a more strategic view of current service provision and priorities across the whole Council and of the funding available.

Executive

The Executive Cabinet Members have a more informed view of issues within their portfolios which informs their work. They hold regular away days to focus on borough wide priorities; consider progress on key projects; undertake long term financial planning, etc.

Overview and scrutiny

Scrutiny Members have a more informed view of issues of concern to the public – this is one of the key measures by which they determine scrutiny review topics. A recent scrutiny workshop generated many member ideas for scrutiny reviews in 2009/10.

Regulatory roles

Members of regulatory committees like Licensing and Planning are better equipped to deal with issues which come before them that are controversial within the community.

Organisation Impact

Members said the initial ward visits had been an opportunity to better develop relationships between themselves and Officers. One Member said "it was interesting to meet Officers I didn't know before".

The programme was open to all Councillors and was delivered at minimal cost. All Councillors were involved in multiple aspects of the programme – some in all aspects. All sessions were delivered using in house staff for just under £2,500, the major expense being transport. This represents great value for money, the value of the "on site" experience is clear from Member feedback.

Specific Impacts:

Member development made a key contribution to the Council's recent Comprehensive Area Assessment where they were awarded 4 out of 4 for Organisational Assessment (Use of Resources and Managing Performance). The Council scored 4/4 for KLOE 2.3 (Governing the Business).

Quote from Parish Council Chair

“All (Parish Council) Members share my view that we have seen more action and engagement from Chorley Council in the last eighteen months than ever before, which is brilliant!”

Audit Commission comments include:

"Member development is strong enabling Members to effectively represent their communities interest and to provide effective challenge within the Council"

"Every elected Member has an up to date PDP which identifies possible training needs. Feedback from training sessions is positive, with 90% of Councillors stating that they were very satisfied with the training provided."

Community Impact

Ward walks had an instant impact with a significant amount of issues being included in Action Plans. Neighbourhood profiles provided Councillors with more information about their area and the consultation processes allowed them even greater access to residents and their views.

Specific Impacts:

The learning session on Accessing Ward Resources was highlighted by NW Employers

“An understanding of the funding sources available from outside the Council – this aim was an unqualified success... most Members interviewed mentioned this training session and how they had been able to make use of it to further projects in their neighbourhood.”

This is backed up by an update from the Grass Roots Grants Fund showing that 42 projects totalling over £150,000 were distributed between October 2008 and April 2009.

There was strong evidence of impact for two community partners, a parish council and a community centre. The parish council thought that links between themselves and the borough council had strengthened.

"All (Parish Council) Members share my view that we have seen more action and engagement from Chorley Council in the last eighteen months than ever before, which is brilliant!"

Quote from Parish Council Chair

There was evidence of a change in council culture. The community representatives felt that there had been a change in attitude from the Council towards empowering them to do things that would have an impact e.g. run their own community centre with a youth club, which was contributing to reducing petty crime and antisocial behaviour in that area.

They began to work more closely with partners locally:

“ Working together (with councillors) to improve the neighbourhood helps the local residents to develop a sense of pride for the area in which they live, improvements are maintained and there is less anti-social behaviour taking place ”

Quote from a local Police Sergeant in the Neighbourhood Policing Team

“ I try to do a street condition audit about every three weeks, it helps to work with the local Councillors as we can exchange information with one another ”

Quote from a Housing Association Officer

A survey of residents in 2009, showed that the learning and development was having a positive impact on the effectiveness of Members in the eyes of the public. Satisfaction with the advice and support provided by elected members has increased from 49.8% in 2007 / 8 to 67.7%.

What could we have done better?

With hindsight they felt that some things could be improved upon – there were missed opportunities to gather evidence; improvements could be made in how events are organised and publicised to maximise outcomes, but overall they were pleased with how the Level 2 process went. The assessment day was the toughest challenge and Members and Officers needed to understand the depth and range of questions they may be asked.

Continuous improvement

As part of the programme of continuous member improvement, Chorley has introduced a fortnightly electronic bulletin specifically for Members called 'intheknow' – an ezine with bite sized updates about key issues of interest to Members – with links to more detailed information if required. This has been an unqualified success and quickly became a key means of communication within the organisation. Updates on neighbourhood issues and Member development opportunities are just two of the regular features.

They are also developing next years calendar of meetings and timetabling in Neighbourhood Tours with partners so that the valued on site contact continues.

Contact for Further Information

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Summary

On a daily basis in 2005 evidence indicated that e-channels of communication were fast becoming the choice of communication in Fylde for more and more residents with increased web hits and increased email address requests. Some Members began to request support and advice on how to get online and use their own email facilities effectively.

A growing community need was also emerging from local residents and partners for e-access to Members particularly in rural communities of the borough. This was further evidenced in responses to Listening Day research and customer feedback forms. Listening Day feedback showed that 36% of residents preferred to contact the Council and Members online.

The Leader of the Council gave support to e-developments in 2005:

"It is clear that Elected Members need to be in touch with the changing face of local democracy and community leadership and the route to success lies in effective online communication."

The Leader of the Council gave support to e-developments in 2005:

“It is clear that Elected Members need to be in touch with the changing face of local democracy and community leadership and the route to success lies in effective online communication.”

Since then a culture change has been experienced in a short period of time as a result of the introduction of a creative e-learning programme which formed the basis of the Level 2 application. On top of the real e-learning a significant outcome has been a transformation of the attitudes and behaviour of the members towards e-communications.

Prior to the learning and development programme only a handful of members used email and hardly any had websites or blogs and community based e-forums were a 'pipe dream'. Today 50 of the 51

elected members use email and a large number have their own websites, blogs and online social networking. Members actively seek additional help and support to obtain more knowledge and understanding of e-communications.

Fylde council have come a long way since gaining the Charter Level 1 award in 2005. Following their success at the MJ award for Councillor Development Achievement of the year 2008 they were awarded Level 2 status in 2009.

Background to the Council

Fylde is a coastal borough in north-west Lancashire and one of twelve districts in the county. Fylde has a geographical area of 166 square km and a population of about 76,000. The main towns within the borough are the resorts of Lytham and St Annes. Further inland, the borough contains the smaller urban areas of Kirkham, Wesham, Freckleton and Warton. A large proportion of the other areas within Fylde are rural in nature and within those areas there are a number of other attractive villages. The villages vary in both size and accessibility to services.

There are 51 Elected Members at Fylde and the make up is as follows:

- 30 Conservatives
- 13 Independents
- 2 Liberal Democrats
- 2 Individual Non Aligned
- 3 Ratepayers
- 1 Independent Non Aligned

The Council's committee structure was restructured in 2006 which led to a Leader and Cabinet system being introduced. There are also four Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the regulatory committees of Development Control and Licensing.

Who was involved in the Member Development Programme?

- Fylde's cross party Member Development Steering Group
- Member Development Officer
- Key members of the Management Team (where appropriate)
- Members of the community

Key Learning for other councils applying for Level 2

- Gaining buy-in / commitment from the Member Development Steering Group, the Leader of the Council and key officers within the organisation is essential.
- Setting aside time early on to plan a clear timeframe / direction and ensuring good process mapping is in place.
- Choosing the right subject is key to getting it right.
- Having a robust Member Development Strategy so that everything links together well.

Approach to the Level 2 process

In order to meet the demand for e-communications from the local community it was necessary to start by developing the ability, skills and knowledge of members through a comprehensive IT training and development programme so they could effectively interact with all stakeholders in the community.

The initial assessment of e-learning development needs for members was carried out as part of an overview and scrutiny exercise and the IEG e-government project. The baseline position in 2004 had shown that very few members (8) had the technology, skill and knowledge to access and use electronic forms of communication. Interest was limited and in some cases despite growing community pressure there was resistance to e-access being part of the modern councillor of the future.

The PDP process complemented an IT Skills Assessment undertaken during 2007 following the election. This provided evidence that very few elected members possessed the necessary knowledge and understanding to begin to use e-platforms. Some Members expressed a 'fear' of what they did not know so confidence was a factor. It was clear that investment in training and development must run parallel with the provision of hardware and software.

The development of e-communications represented an opportunity to address the issue of engagement with a greater number of younger people and other groups that choose online communication as their preferred method.

A Fylde Youth Council Representative stated:

“Councillors need to get with the times and get online to connect with everyone in their community. It will be the way forward for future generations”

It was recognised that e-communication offered an important move towards enhancing community leadership and cohesion and providing greater engagement with a wider audience. The importance of this for Members was being driven from the top by the Leader of the Council who as part of his own development had completed the Improvement and Development Agency Leadership Academy Course.

Feedback from customer services indicated that many constituents received limited information about local matters but their expectations were changing with the development of new technologies and they expected to access their Member by email and to get real time updates from a dedicated website for their community.

It was evident that e-communication would be complementary to established community engagement methods and particularly improve accessibility in rural wards. Councillor Paul Rigby felt quite strongly saying:

“A large number of my constituents are farmers and rural workers that don't have time to get to my house never mind the distant town hall. I needed a way for them to have instant access to me 24/7.”

E-government grants were being used across the country to e-enable Members and Fylde had clearly identified the need to provide Members with the necessary hardware and software. Fylde used the government grants to purchase laptops for all 51 Members. These were given out in line with relevant training.

The establishment of a comprehensive learning and development programme provided a platform to enable Members to understand and contribute to the overall service delivery and make full use of appropriate hardware and software. A number of key objectives were outlined at the beginning and have been subject to review by the Member Development Steering Group:

- Ensure Members are aware of, understand and can contribute effectively to the overall shift towards e-Government
- Ensure Members understand the need to change existing business processes and the benefits and risks that this offers and to ensure they can all contribute effectively to business change
- Ensure Members are properly and adequately trained to make the full use of the hardware and software provided for them to carry out their responsibilities
- Ensure Members are aware of current and emerging technologies, which might be of benefit to them

Councillor Tim Ashton

“The number of emails I receive and respond to far exceeds all other forms of contact put together and has led to a dramatic increase in the total number of contacts I have on a daily basis.”

- Create a “can do” culture amongst Members which encourages the innovative exploration and use of ITC and the challenging of inappropriate and outmoded ways of working
- Ensure resources for ITC training and development are effectively and efficiently targeted in order to add the greatest possible value for the investment made

To support the successful delivery of the objectives a range of learning and development initiatives linked to community needs were put into place:

- Awareness courses that covered the importance and role of e-methods of access and communication and the contribution this makes to community leadership, cohesion and engagement

- Continual reinforcement of the benefits of e-communication through member newsletters and the Steering Group etc.
- Equality, diversity and accessibility courses in relation to e-platforms being used as a primary channel for community engagement e.g. plain English web pages, email etiquette and use of features in email
- A comprehensive ongoing IT Training and Development Programme including, introduction to the basic skills required to use computers, email, develop websites, publisher, ECDL, writing blogs, office software and engaging in online forums
- Development of online polls and online surveys to allow Members to obtain regular and ongoing feedback and opinion

- A dedicated IT support resource to mentor and coach Members available as and when required to help boost confidence and provide reassurance
- Individual development needs assessment and evaluation of e-learning to keep pace with ever changing technologies and to ensure that Members get the maximum from the software they have
- Protocols and ethical standards of governance for the e-environment to ensure the reputation of the Council is upheld and Members are aware of boundaries in what is often seen as an unregulated environment
- Branding and reputation management training for dedicated websites, blogs and forum contributions to achieve maximum impact in the local community and easy identification / recognition
- Community promotion and awareness techniques in the e-environment e.g. e-registers, e-alerts and e-subscribers in their wards, online events calendars, e-meeting agendas and e-minutes etc to support an enhanced presence and impact in the local community
- Email and mail box management courses and support to ensure maximum efficiency from e-communication channels
- Member to Member coaching and mentoring support to encourage personal development and instil confidence
- Formal external courses on office software packages and basic computing skills through local trainers that live and operate in the Fylde community
- Online learning and development and online home learning either through the authority or third party providers allowing Members to complete training in their own time in their own environment
- Remote learning on the Council network where the trainer takes control of the 'PC' from a remote point and 'walks' the Member through an issue
- A dedicated ICT online helpdesk for ad hoc support and quick fixes

In 2008 a revised dedicated IT Training and Development Strategy was put in place just for Members at Fylde. As a consequence the member e-learning and e-development has been delivered through a wide range of formats to suit the learning needs of the members.

The learning programme has provided 50 of the 51 Members with the minimum level of skill and knowledge to effectively enable them to use electronic means of communication to engage with the local community.

Outcomes and Impact

The issues for the community and the authority were significant issues that reflected society as a whole with the requirement to use technology as part of the way we work today. Addressing these issues through e-learning for Members has created stronger community leaders and a greater sense of cohesion because Members are more accessible to a wider audience.

Evaluation and monitoring of e-learning is continuous with feedback regularly reviewed and assessed to improve the training, the environment and the quality of course materials.

Key improvements in the e-communication journey which Members are proud of are:

- A dedicated ICT resource has been set up to provide ongoing support and advice to elected members
- A dedicated corporate resource to support Members on web developed and bespoke performance management software
- Several Members have possession of their own website or blogs that they rely on as the primary means of engagement with their community and have developed a bank of subscribers – there is no going back from this way of working
- A well established and embedded policy and procedure for Member learning and development

Individual Impact

The most significant improvement has been the transformation of the attitudes and behaviour of the Members towards e-access. Prior to the learning and development programme only a handful of members were using email and hardly any had websites or blogs and community based e-forums were a 'pipe dream'.

50 of the 51 Members now have email access and a large number have their own websites and blogs and almost all are signed up to use the community forum Fyldelife. Almost every Member has some direct involvement with a website or social networking site.

"The number of emails I receive and respond to far exceeds all other forms of contact put together and has led to a dramatic increase in the total number of contacts I have on a daily basis" **Councillor Tim Ashton**

Members are able to 'manage' press myths and local misconceptions through forums, blogs and factual articles on their website saving time and resources.

The e-learning agenda lends itself to instant and easy feedback from the local community. Some Members did get initial criticism of their web offerings, but improved quickly with additional support and advice based on their specific requirements.

"The first version of the ward website was poor in places but residents and friends provided suggestions and comments that I used to make improvements"

Councillor John Singleton

Evidence from recent personal appraisals demonstrates a significant increase in requests for training and development on more sophisticated software and systems e.g. spreadsheets, Publisher and Adobe along with social networking options.

“ I joined Facebook to keep in touch with my friends but it has now become a way for constituents to know the person behind the elected member ”

Councillor Karen Buckley

There have been improved member to member relationships from all political groupings through online sharing of information, experiences and debate that leads to improved and more informed decision making for the local community.

There have also been improved officer and member relationships through improved e-communications allowing out of hours dialogue and responses which is often when members need to get back to residents or respond to an issue.

Accountability of Members and their role in the community has improved with the enhanced access to them and because of the improved quality of the information that they send out.

Now that members have the skills to develop their own e-channels they have increased their accessibility and openness to achieve a better understanding of what they represent in the local community and the issues they stand for. This proactive approach improves community leadership, cohesion and the sense of place that are cornerstones of elected member role.

Councillor John Singleton

“ The first version of the ward website was poor in places but residents and friends provided suggestions and comments that I used to make improvements ”

Community Impact

People in the local community now express more confidence in their Members because e-communications have created an open and transparent environment for debate and feedback.

“ Is it really the Leader of the Council that dedicates time to respond to the public on this Forum? I personally find it astounding because most council leaders are afraid of being accessible in today's day and age surrounded by PR people that tell them what to wear, what to say and which baby to kiss. ”

Fylde Forum

As a direct result of the training and development programme for Members the local community has experienced direct benefits that include:

- A greater level of engagement between the local community and Members
- Efficient and responsive online services including informative websites, forums and blogs that focus on local issues and respond to local enquiries
- Members with the knowledge and ability to maximize community engagement through e-communications using polls, surveys, e-alerts and social networking to communicate their key messages
- The provision of timely and accurate information to the local community through e-channels

- Free websites and training for local community groups that are linked to the common 'landing page' of Fydelife that acts as an online 'One Stop Shop' for the community creating a greater sense of place and belonging
- Improved understanding by the local community of the responsibilities and achievements of elected members through easy access to reliable information that has come 'straight from the horses mouth' with the ability to respond and / or challenge instantly

One of the community representatives said that Fylde council had helped them to set up a website and since this has been set up more people have been contacting them. They thought they were now able to offer access for more people and the membership of the organisation had increased.

As a direct result of the training and development Members now use e-communications with constituents 24 / 7. The demand from residents to be able to contact Members at their convenience has been satisfied.

The Leader of the Council and other elected members regularly participate in online forums responding directly to issues as and when they happen.

Members apply their learning on e-communications to provide 'up to the minute' news and information to constituents on a pro-active basis. Very often the outcome of an afternoon meeting is online through their website or blog by early evening. Rural members are reporting regular communication with constituents that they previously only heard from when there was a problem. Now they are up to speed with the latest initiatives in their local community and can provide comment, make suggestions and any other form of feedback at their leisure. Members now have the capacity to dedicate more time to other duties because they are not 'bogged' down with long journeys to distribute paper based information.

“ I can now provide information to hundreds of residents at the touch of a few buttons where previously I need the whole family to help me get round to everyone over a few days ”

Councillor Janine Owen

Evidence shows that two way dialogue and discussion has increased between elected members and their constituents through online forums and emails with e-conversations a common feature for many members on both straight forward and controversial issues in an open and democratic manner.

An example of effective two way dialogue, debate and the provision of timely information was demonstrated over the decision to close two swimming pools in the borough. Blog sites, email and websites proved to be invaluable for getting full, accurate and comprehensive details about why the decision had been made to a wide audience.

"I received thousands of emails about the decision to close the pools and it was possible to respond to everyone online by copying and pasting information updates. Without email this work would have taken weeks" **Councillor Keith Hyde**

Several members have carried out online surveys, polls and virtual surgeries that requires them to be logged online to provide real time responses during a preset published time period. This work has been a major success with Members reporting a better response to online survey work than previous door to door or postal surveys. Online polls have also been used by elected members to obtain a snapshot opinion on local issues.

Organisation Impact

The increased online engagement experienced by most of the elected members provides strong evidence that the demand from customers that prefer to communicate online is being met.

Evidence from service based research indicates that more and more customers choose to deal with the Council using the website and email with figures increasing to over 14,000 unique web users a month and 2100 online transactions. Members are experiencing similar increases in the demand to communicate online at the convenience of the customer.

Clear links were established between corporate objectives and the e-learning in particular the need to develop high quality efficient service delivery and enhance the community leadership role.

Value for money has been achieved in several key areas as a direct result of e-learning including:

- The creation of capacity and time for both officers and members because of the ability to carry out their activities quicker and more efficiently
- Savings of thousands of pounds have been achieved for the authority on paper, print and postage because elected members receive electronic communications
- There is easy and cheap access to Members through e-channels for residents, visitors, partners and suppliers which has reduced transaction costs for the authority and the third party
- Significantly reduced need for members services team to simply 'pass on' email communications to members in paper format
- A more efficient and effective local councillor who provides information quickly to a large number of people and easily enters into efficient online dialogue and / or debate

→ Direct savings have been achieved for Members because of the reduced need to produce and distribute newsletters and community information

→ The ability to communicate quickly and efficiently between groups of elected members has achieved time savings and reduced the number of meetings required

The Audit Commission acknowledge the successful approach to Member Development in the 2008 CPA and Fylde is used as an example of good practice in the West Midlands LGA Member Development Evaluation Toolkit.

What could have been done better?

They felt that it would have helped if they had chosen the subject area early on in the process, to ensure efficient and effective recording of all evidence / feedback.

Councillor Keith Hyde

“ I received thousands of emails about the decision to close the pools and it was possible to respond to everyone online by copying and pasting information updates. Without email this work would have taken weeks. ”

Continuous Improvement

The authority is dedicated to continuous e-learning that addresses the increased demand from the community. This recognition is reflected in a member led approach to development and a commitment to continuous improvement is also reflected in the refreshed Elected Member Strategy.

Members now actively seek more help and support as their knowledge and understanding of e-access channels and facilities improves.

Facebook and Twitter accounts are challenging the Member Development Group to set a more comprehensive learning agenda.

Contact for Further Information

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Summary

Assessed as an Investor in People since 1997 and holder of the North West Charter for Elected Member Development since 2001, Halton Borough Council has a history of providing excellent Training and Development opportunities.

After a successful Charter Review in 2004, a significant amount of work was undertaken to review and improve the Training and Development Programme that was on offer to all Members in the council. The development of a competency framework based on the Member Development Framework competencies designed by Syniad, the Welsh Local Government Association was a significant move forward.

They were awarded Level 2 in April 2007, the application concentrated on their Member Development Programme. The programme was intended to enhance their previous programmes and continue to embed Member development into the culture of the authority. It is a flexible, competency-based programme, consisting of four modules, reflecting progression at different stages of tenure and is accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management.

The competency-based programme was complemented by the following:

- Personal development meetings resulting in the identification of personal learning style and the production of individual personal development plans
- Two personal mentors – political and officer
- A full range of learning opportunities in the form of information, direct training, facilitated workshops and briefings, use of more than 400 flexible learning packages and audio CDs
- e-Learning and web-based courses from Learndirect and Learning Pool
- An annual training award, hosted by the mayor, which recognises an individual's commitment.

Challenging training and development targets are incorporated within the service plan for Committee and Member Services, both officers and Members demonstrate their ongoing commitment to learning and development.

Councillor John Swain

“The process involved in attaining Level 2 proved to be a real catalyst for us to reflect on, and develop, our evaluation processes. We can now clearly assess the impact of training and development on members' effectiveness and feedback clearly suggests it has led to the encouragement and enhancement of member engagement.”

Background to the Council

The Borough of Halton is situated on either side of the River Mersey in North Cheshire, adjacent to Merseyside in northwest England. Halton is made up of the twin towns of Widnes and Runcorn, together with the villages of Hale, Halebank, Moore, Daresbury, Sandymoor and Preston Brook. It is the most densely-populated district in Cheshire with 118,210 people.

Halton has 56 Councillors, currently there is one vacancy. They are elected by thirds – three years in four. The political make up is 33 Labour, 13 Liberal Democrat (one vacancy) and 9 Conservative councillors. It operates with an Executive of a Leader and Cabinet of up to 9 councillors.

Who was involved in the Member Development Programme?

- The strong, committed and active cross-party Member Development Group;
- The Leader of the Council;
- Head of Committee and Members Services;
- Member's Services officers;
- ILM
- Department officers;
- External providers.

Key Learning for other councils applying for Level 2

- Commitment at the highest level is essential to champion member development
- Gain support from all party groups
- Encourage all Members to take the opportunity to discuss their development and draw up an individual personal development plan
- Ensure the member development strategy is integrated into organisational development strategies.
- Incorporate challenging training and development targets within the service plan.

Approach to the Level 2 process

Prior to 2004, previous Elected Member Development programmes had been successful in that Members were offered a range of "off the shelf" classroom based events, and a Mentoring scheme.

However, events were not always tailored to individual needs, they were not linked to a competency framework, the use of open learning was limited, and levels of attendance at events continued to present a challenge.

Following Charter reassessment in 2004, Halton reviewed its programme and decided on the following critical success factors:

- A programme, which enhanced the previous programmes and continued to embed Member Development into Halton's culture;
- To offer Members a range of opportunities, which allowed them to develop their knowledge and skills so that they could play their part in meeting the needs of Halton's communities;
- A programme that was a complete competency-based package ensuring that Members had the opportunity to discuss their development and draw up an individual Personal Development Plan (MAP) tailored to meet their needs;
- A programme which was modular in format, accessible and relevant to all Members irrespective of level of experience as a Councillor, work or family commitments;
- A programme that recognised the commitment from its participants and was accredited by an external body.

To address these areas, it was decided to extend the pilot of Personal Development Plans and use the Member Development Framework (produced by the Welsh LGA (Synaid) to produce a structured, modular, competency-based programme.

Each Module that they developed clearly showed:

- Events / interventions included in the programme
- Links to Synaid competency framework
- Learning Outcomes
- Duration of events / programme
- Methods of delivery
- Timescales

The table below summarises the competencies & learning outcomes for each of the four modules of the programme:

Module 1 New Member Induction	Module 2 Foundation	Module 3 Intermediate	Module 4 Advanced
Understand The Work Context & Environment	Participate at meetings & sit on Council	Provide leadership & direction	Act as an employer within H&S guidelines
Use ICT	Hold Surgeries & Deal with Casework	Represent the Council	Express yourself effectively
Establish Community Links	Manage time & handle data	Manage Council's reputation	Provide community leadership, working in partnership
Relate To Officers	Obtain resources	Make decisions	Review & develop policy
Work To Ethical Standards		Develop ICT skills	Manage performance & improvement
		Work with others within H&S regulations	

Module 1 – New Member Induction, covers the competencies and behaviours Members should be able to demonstrate after six months;

Module 2 – The Foundation Module covers some of the essential, core development skills Members should be able to demonstrate after 12 months;

Module 3 – Intermediate Module gives Members the opportunity for developing their skills, and the competencies and behaviours they should be able to demonstrate after 2 years;

Module 4 – Advanced Module – aims to allow Members to enhance their skills in particular personal development areas. It covers the competencies and behaviours Members should be able to demonstrate after 3 years;

The modular approach used by the authority, combined with tailoring the development to the individual, proved to be particularly effective. The programme offers a variety of methods for learning ranging from classroom based events, mentoring sessions, briefings, seminars, tours of the

Borough, training courses, facilitated workshops, coaching, opportunities to learn from observation, audio and computer-based packages on-line or open-learning approaches. This varied style of delivery was especially useful where Members had very little spare time.

As a learning organisation, Halton's programme aims to ensure that Members are offered training and development opportunities that will allow them to perform their roles effectively. This aim is reinforced by the inclusion of 3 targets for Member Development in Divisional and Service Plans. Two of the 3 performance targets are quantitative, in that they measure the number of people with Personal Development Plans (MAPs) and levels of attendance at organised events.

The qualitative evidence of learning and competence is assessed in the following two ways:

- At the end of an intervention, through an initial impact assessment form
- During the six monthly MAP reviews with the Head of Committee and Member Services

Members appreciated receiving certificates at the annual Member Training Awards Ceremony and having the programme accredited by an outside body. They also liked having the choice – if they wished to spend 25 hours on their development they could apply for Institute of Leadership & Management accreditation.

The key element to the programme's success still lies with the Personal Development meetings with the Head of Committee and Member Services, which result in the preparation / and or review of an individual's Personal Development Plan (MAP). To help prepare for the Personal Development meeting Members are asked to complete a learning styles questionnaire and to identify five personal strengths and areas for development.

A copy of the MAP is sent to Member Services for recording in the Elected Member Training Needs Database. This database provides vital management information used to plan and commission training events with an appropriate provider and monitor performance against targets.

The Member Development Group plays a pivotal role in deciding what development is offered; monitoring performance; submitting ideas for improvement and developments; as an Action Learning Set trialling learning supports.

Evidence of learning and competence is assessed at the end of each intervention, through an initial impact form, and during the process map. Here individuals identify skills acquired, reflect and provide examples of how they have been able to demonstrate each competency or outcome in their role.

The council evaluates its whole programme with quarterly performance monitoring reports to the Senior Management team and Member Development group. There is an annual report to the Leader and Mayor.

Outcomes and Impact

It is clear that Member development isn't seen as an extra at Halton, it is an intrinsic part of their culture. So much so that they are able to respond quickly to new areas of need.

The number of opportunities offered have increased year-on-year, as has the level of attendance.

The programme has also been recognised at national level by Halton being the first authority to gain the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) endorsement in 2005, by being finalists in the Local Government Chronicle Awards and being the 2006 winners of Municipal Journal and Association of Public Service Excellence Awards.

The authority was accepted for accreditation in July 2005. Seven Members received the award in 2006 and 13 in 2007.

Members felt that role play was a particularly effective way to learn about how a full Council meeting operated. New members felt they were able to contribute more confidently after the role play exercise.

Individual Impact

The most significant impact the programme has had is that members regularly report, give examples and are able to demonstrate increased personal competence, confidence and effectiveness resulting from taking advantage of the learning opportunities provided.

One Member felt that following the development programme, they were more confident with constituents and community groups. They were able to approach sections of the Council and challenge them. They have challenged the authority on a planning issue.

Another Member described how they had spent time visiting day care centres, consulting the users, identifying problems and then coming up with some improvements.

Listed below are extracts of a cross section of responses made by Members at their six monthly MAP reviews when they discussed their training and levels of competence:

- "I have recently put mentoring skills into practice with a new mentee"
- "I have identified stress factors and avoid them in the day to day environment. Also recently I noticed a chair blocking a fire exit at a Council building and arranged for it to be removed"
- "I have been able to take on the wider responsibility recently acquired around the budget process"

“ I'm more aware of Personal Safety, especially when dealing with constituents ”

- "Local Government Finance training helps me ensure that I have a small input into the fair allocation of funds that are always over demanded";
- "Know how to deal with media enquiries effectively";
- "Successfully handled recent issue with an entertainment licence";
- "Now have the ability to listen to users views and be a positive critical friend to establishments";

- Able to identify reading matter that is technical or non technical, and use skills to devote more attention to understanding technical data;
- Quickly able to answer constituents concerns over planning applications
- "Have acquired an insight into planning legislation – Now more careful about ward planning issues and how this affects being involved in decisions"
- "Gave me a insight into ways in which I can influence debate"

Community Impact

Members now feel more confident about running their surgeries.

One of our members said

“ I recently chaired an Area Forum and was complimented by an opposition colleague on the way the meeting was run, also I gave party response at Council and was complimented by the Mayor on the standard of my speech.”

Officers added that there was evidence that more Members chair public meetings (some did not want to previously).

A few years ago the Member Services section used to receive complaints from community groups that Members were not supporting them. This is no longer the case.

There is evidence that Resources Training enabled one Member to help a community group obtain more funding.

Two community organisations were contacted regarding their views of Member involvement. The organisations felt that they receive Member support whenever they asked for it, and sometimes before. Both organisations felt very happy with the level of support that they received from Members. Comments were very positive "always very involved"; "always makes himself available"; "more inclined to do things"; "more active, wants to participate and help the group achieve things".

The council has also been able to share its good practice both regionally and nationally by responding to requests by other Councils for explanations about the development programmes (e.g.: Brighton & Hove, Cumbria, Barnstaple, Calderdale, Three Rivers, Staffordshire, North Shropshire,

South Gloucester, Hereford, North Tyneside, Oldham, Weymouth & Portland, and Tameside) and during presentations at the following events:

- The launch of the West Midlands Local Authorities Charter in Stafford in October 2004,
- The IDeA / NWEO "Revitalising Induction" event at Wigan in March 2006
- The South West Region Councillor Development Network at Taunton in September 2006.

Organisation Impact

One Member thought that the modular programme had helped Halton meet its corporate priorities by sharpening up the contribution of Members to the process.

Members were better able to perform in their scrutiny role. The Overview & Scrutiny process had changed from nit-picking to looking at wider issues.

Policy issues are taken up more often as part of the Policy and Performance Boards. The Corporate Performance Board came up with a mine of information over a six month period about active Member involvement. The Environmental PPB looked at alcohol abuse and were the first to introduce a ban on drinking in public places.

Some Members undertook financial training – a one-to-one session about revenue and capital. When they went to a local committee meeting they were able to pick up on the fact that an organisation had been paid twice, which saved money for a community group they were working with.

Members are progressively engaging with the public more through Area Forums.

In Overview & Scrutiny, Members are making sure services are cost effective. In a recent consultation exercise about day centres, Members became confident enough to carry out the consultations.

The Member Development Programme undoubtedly contributed significantly when the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) awarded Halton "Excellent" status in 2005. This was further consolidated when in 2006, it achieved "4 stars" (the highest category) awarded in the Audit Commissions "Harder Test" CPA regime.

The Personal Development Review (MAP) process was one of the areas specifically cited by IDeA as good practice when they won the 2006 Municipal Journal Achievement Awards for "Member Development Achievement of the Year".

What could we have done better?

Looking back, Members felt that they could have made clearer links between member development and the council's corporate priorities and they could have been clearer about the connection between the training and community level outcomes.

Continuous Improvement

Halton continues to work with Chester University towards a Higher Education Certificate for Members.

The council is also working towards 360 Degree feedback for Members who wish to use it.

Contacts for Further Information

Councillor John Swain

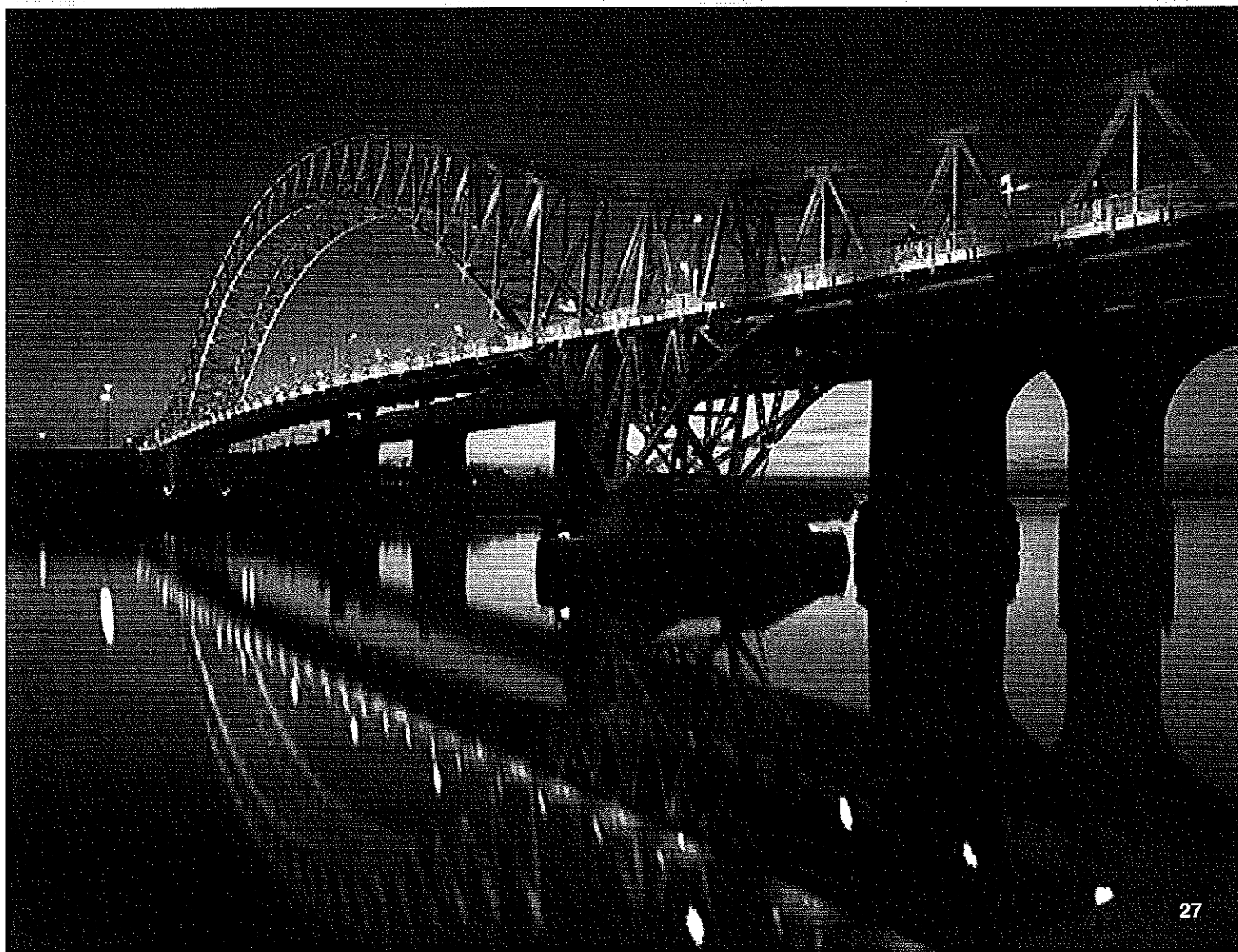
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Summary

Late in 2005, Elected Members were asked by officers to consider a proposal for the introduction of fortnightly refuse collections. The introduction of fortnightly collections was at that time proving popular with a number of local authorities; however, this move was reported in the press as being increasingly unpopular with the community.

In response to the officers' proposal, members in Knowsley were absolutely resolute that they would not make a decision on any changes to the refuse collection service without knowing the full facts and impact that such a change would have on the community.

Consequently to enable informed consideration and decision making on any changes to refuse collection and waste minimisation, members commissioned public surveys, undertook two scrutiny reviews and engaged with officers, partners and the community in the process.

“A survey of 15,000 households showed that 43% said 'nothing' would encourage them to recycle more.”

'A survey of 15,000 households showed that 43% said 'nothing' would encourage them to recycle more.'

Following the work undertaken by the members as part of this first review, the subsequent introduction of the co-mingled recycling collection service in June 2008, had a very positive impact on the Council's household waste recycling performance leading to the council exceeding its 25% Local Area Agreement household waste recycling target for 2008 / 09 and delivering £0.410m of efficiency savings from its waste collection service.

As community leaders, the importance of elected members understanding and support for improvements to Knowsley's recycling services was vital. Consequently it became a priority of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Waste Management, the Chairman of the Members Training and Development Task Group and the Scrutiny Committee Chairman to support a programme of training and education about the household waste management agenda for elected members. This learning process was the focus of their Charter Level 2 achievement

Background to the Council

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough is an area of 33 square miles located between the cities of Liverpool and Manchester, and connected to both cities by major motorways. The borough has a population of 151,000 and is an important location for employment in the Liverpool City Region and a major source of workers for the area.

The council consists of 63 councillors, with one-third elected three years in four. There are two political groups represented on the council. The Labour Party hold 47 seats, the Liberal Democrat Party hold 15 seats and there is currently 1 vacant seat. The council appoints the Cabinet consisting of 10 elected members, scrutiny committees which assist in the review and development of policy and hold the executive to account, regulatory committees which deal with quasi-judicial matters and Area Partnership Boards.

Who was involved in the Member Development Programme?

- Members
- Officers
- Residents
- Partner agencies

Key Learning for other councils applying for Level 2

- Choose a topic early on;
- Find out what the learning gaps are before you start and develop your training appropriately;
- Get members on board and tailor learning to individual needs;
- Use different methods of learning for example site visits;
- Ensure all members are regularly aware of the learning on offer;
- Record all comments including emails, evaluation forms and especially ad hoc comments

Approach to the Level 2 process

In a door step survey in 2006 which covered 14,461 residents, it was discovered that they felt that their commitment to recycling was not being reflected in the quantity of recycling actually achieved. It was also found that service reliability was a factor in respect to the recycling collections. The clear outcome identified from this survey was that service reliability needed to be addressed and greater focus placed upon communication with residents to promote the recycling services provided and to encourage participation.

At the same time members and officers were receiving further feedback from the community that more could be done to reduce waste and improve recycling rates in Knowsley. Comments, complaints and feedback in relation to this service area were raised at elected members' surgeries, community meetings and through the council's Customer Services Teams. Members were aware that this issue presented a major challenge for the authority, but were absolutely clear that the service was in need of change. They wanted a refuse and recycling service which placed the needs of local residents at its heart, meeting or exceeding the expectations of the community.

Environmental Services data showed only 16% of waste collected was being recycled in 2006/7, with the rest going to landfill. If the authority didn't meet targets of 35% recycling by 2010/11 they would face potential financial penalties in the region of £7.5m.

There remained a significant challenge to deliver a further step-change in recycling performance so as to achieve the 2010/11 Local Area Agreement stretch target beyond the anticipated targets for 2015 and 2020. It is against these key drivers for change and the need to maintain and improve customer satisfaction that a further review of the waste collection system options that will deliver a step change in household waste recycling performance was undertaken in 2008.

The first step in addressing this complex challenge for members was to make waste management a key item to consider as part of the scrutiny committee review processes in 2007/08 and 2008/09. These reviews looked at waste collection options in great detail through numerous meetings, site visits, interviewing expert witnesses, and data analysis, waste collection options that would deliver a step change in household waste recycling. At the end of this process, members had a much greater understanding of the issues and were able to present comprehensive reports to Cabinet outlining ways in which the Council could overhaul its household waste recycling performance.

A number of desired outcomes were clear from the outset of this learning and development journey, other outcomes were identified along the route.

The prime objective was to empower members by providing them with the knowledge, skills and experience to be able to make appropriate recommendations to the Council's Cabinet to meet the strategic and local waste management agendas. The aspiration was that all elected members would feel confident and knowledgeable enough to champion any new service delivery models within the community and respond to any enquiries from the public.

It became clear at an early stage in the process that each elected member had different levels of existing knowledge, skills, capacity and experience to undertake this challenging work. An analysis of the training needed was carried out through the PDP process, group and individual discussions with senior officers, scrutiny committees and the Chairman of the Members Training and Development Task Group as well as the Cabinet Member with responsibility for waste management. The member's learning and development needs were identified as:

- enhanced scrutiny and challenge skills;
- an understanding of how the scrutiny process can be effective in influencing change;
- ability to understand and analyse detailed data;
- understanding of local government finance and budget setting;
- an appreciation of the radical improvement in performance required to achieve future targets under the Knowsley Partnership's Local Area Agreement and the Merseyside Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy;

- ability to communicate effectively and promote the new service to the community;
- handling enquiries and effective casework;
- using IT to assist members in their area ;
- considering risks and risk management;
- using performance information;
- chairing and presentational skills;
- effective partnership working;
- managing industrial relations;
- understanding the role of the council as a member of the Merseyside Waste Partnership;
- understanding the environmental impact of landfill disposal;
- identifying future household waste collection methods following an appraisal of options.

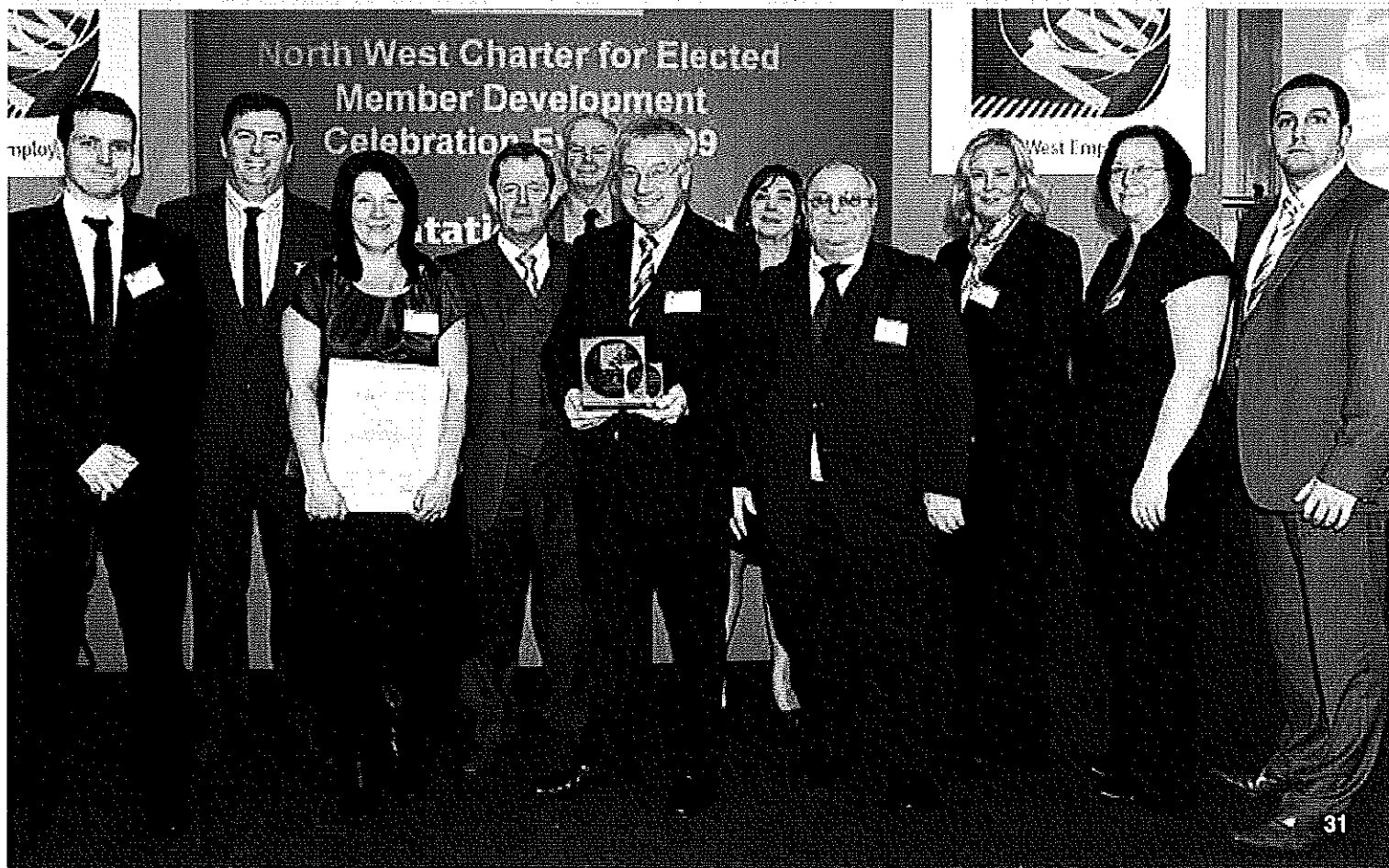
A key challenge in relation to the work was to design and deliver learning and development opportunities that would meet the members needs in a way that would help members to identify, understand and be able to make recommendations to resolve issues effectively, without becoming 'bogged down' or side tracked in technical and detailed explanations and analysis.

To address the learning needs a number of learning streams were offered through groups, one to one training sessions, workshops, briefings, etc. These covered areas such as:

- public speaking;
- budget setting;
- engaging and influencing the community;
- effective casework;
- partnership working;
- scrutiny training

In addition to those outlined above, other experiential learning methods were used to ensure members' could actively participate:

- Members trialled possible new waste collection services so that they had first hand experience of the effectiveness of the options. They also gained a better understanding of the practicalities of the services; measure their own recycling performance and speak with confidence when advocating the new service to the community and other elected members;
- Presentations, interviews and discussions were given by external 'expert witnesses' and key stakeholders. In addition to information gathering, this gave members the opportunity to practice and develop their partnership working and challenge skills;
- Members attended regional Scrutiny Network meetings to further develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in order to help them fully participate in the scrutiny review process;
- Focused visits were arranged for members to examine other local authorities' waste disposal facilities and wheeled bin manufacturers. This gave them the opportunity to become better informed and see examples of good practice in action;
- Specifically prepared briefings, supported by background statistical and financial spreadsheets were offered to Members;
- Members participated in the 'Influencing Change in Knowsley' and 'Environment' events;
- Attendance at Waste Management conferences and exhibitions such as the LGA Waste Strategy Debate, Waste Management Symposium, Governance Neighbourhoods and Service Delivery Event and the Merseyside Renewable Energy Trade Fair were used to gain a view of regional, national and international issues and practice.



A carefully co-ordinated and comprehensive communications plan was also undertaken to promote public understanding and buy-in to the new co-mingled recycling service which was introduced in June 2008. This was led by the members who felt empowered and sufficiently informed to be able to brief their colleagues on the new co-mingled recycling bin roll-out programme.

They were further assisted in this by the development of a Members' Information Pack, which provided sample communications materials and specific recycling guidance. This enabled all the council's members to provide consistent messages and respond promptly to resident enquiries at the time of the local elections in May 2008.

Local community briefings and events (including the successful 'Phil the Bin' campaign) took place to secure the support of residents and as a result all members were able to act as 'champions' promoting the benefits of recycling.

This campaign resulted in a seamless transition from the former kerbside sort system to the new co-mingled recycling service. This success can be attributed to the partnership working between elected members, officers, residents and partner agencies.

Following the Merseyside Waste Plan Workshop one member commented:

“ This information will help me to explain to residents if questions are asked at meetings and our surgeries. ”

Outcomes and Impact

A process of evaluation and monitoring was carried out from all training and development events and reported to the Members' Training and Development Task Group for analysis. In addition, a summary of all feedback and evaluation from members was forwarded to the sessions' training facilitator and lead officer.

Following discussions with members, it was decided that a number of successful elements from the training used during the 2007/08 waste management scrutiny review could be employed during the 2008/09 review. These learning points and improvements were specifically targeted at creating greater dialogue and interaction between elected members and those presenting information to them.

The focused induction programme assisted a number of newly elected members in becoming actively involved in the review process and the pilot waste collection trial. These relatively inexperienced elected members have stated that following the training and support received, they felt confident enough in their new role to champion and communicate the proposed waste management changes within their wards.

Individual Impact

Without the development opportunities and a clear appreciation of the issues surrounding waste management and waste minimisation, there was a risk that members would not be able to make the necessary considered judgements, successfully articulate this information to colleagues and subsequently champion such a position within their communities.

The members involved in this work did respond positively to the learning and development opportunities provided. Development outcomes which demonstrated how effective the learning had been for members included:

- Positive feedback from members themselves, both anecdotal and through the training evaluation forms;
- The quality of recommendations and presentations to Cabinet and the positive feedback received from Executive Members recorded in the Cabinet minutes;
- Members stating that they felt knowledgeable and confident enough to act as advocates within the community for service changes;
- Members feeling more informed to respond to enquiries at their surgeries;
- Newly elected members being confident enough to Champion the service within the community;
- More positive and constructive engagement with partners and 'expert witnesses' during the scrutiny review;
- More informed discussions about evidence at scrutiny committees;
- Increased member engagement in the council's scrutiny committee review process;
- Confidence to pilot the waste collection scheme championed by members;
- Positive feedback from partner organisations;
- Positive feedback from the community;
- Actual service delivery improvements introduced as a consequence of the learning

The learning and development undertaken enabled members to combine their newly acquired technical appreciation of the subject matter with their local intelligence, appreciation of local community needs and the results of a public consultation waste collection survey.

Following the Merseyside Waste Plan Workshop one member commented:

“ This information will help me to explain to residents if questions are asked at meetings and our surgeries. ”

Another member following the Environmental Services Briefing and Workshop said:

“ It will help me understand the department better, and be able to explain better to my constituents ”

The learning and development opportunities have also allowed members to secure a sound appreciation of the key drivers for change and to inform debate, decide upon and subsequently champion service changes as shown by the following comment after a Scrutiny Workshop:

“ This will help me as a member of scrutiny to understand the working of scrutiny within the council and improve understanding of developments that impact on the scrutiny role and changing legislation ”

Community Impact

The seamless transition from the former kerbside sort system to the new co-mingled recycling service campaign also owes its success to the partnership working between members, officers, residents and partner agencies.

The changes and impact on the community resulting from the work included:

- Introduction of fortnightly co-mingled recycling collections for paper, cardboard, glass, cans, and plastic using a new 240 litre wheeled bin as a replacement to the green boxes. A Knowsley resident observed:

"I have really noticed a difference in the way our refuse is collected recently. It is now a far greater service that we as a community receive"

- Introduction of new recycling services to high-rise flats and multi-occupancy dwellings in November 2008 for the first time through a partnership initiative with the local housing associations.
- Facilitation of behavioural and culture change by encouraging greater community, social and environmental responsibility through public engagement in recycling.

Bob Taylor, Chief Executive – Knowsley Housing Trust was keen to comment on developments:

“ At KHT, we want to minimise the impact of our environmental footprint. We were therefore delighted to work alongside Knowsley Council on this project to minimise waste through recycling. Our multi-storey accommodation provided an ideal project to maximise environmental benefits to our customers. We are committed to working closely with local residents and our partners including KMBC to develop further recycling and green agenda initiatives that will reduce carbon footprints in communities ”

A Knowsley resident observed:

“ I have really noticed a difference in the way our refuse is collected recently. It is now a far greater service that we as a community receive. ”

In the recent Audit Commission Places Survey, 93% of residents had said that they were very or fairly satisfied with the maroon bin refuse collection service and 90% had said that they were very or fairly satisfied with the doorstep grey and blue bin recycling service. These figures were the highest ratings in the 353 local authority areas surveyed, with the North West averages at 76% and 69% respectively.

Organisation Impact

The member learning and development was key to the implementation and establishment of new highly successful recycling services for households across Knowsley. In addition it had a significant impact on the council's ability to contribute to the delivery of the Knowsley Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2023 through the development of a clear strategy to manage waste in a sustainable manner in line with the National Waste Strategy, the Merseyside Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, and the council's financial efficiency agenda.

The council has demonstrated that by implementing the actions championed and approved by members huge improvements in recycling performance can be delivered and significant financial savings achieved e.g.

- Increased commercial waste collection charges by 29% from April 2008 to reflect increased waste disposal landfill costs and ensure full cost recovery. In addition, the number of collection rounds was reduced from two to one by transferring non-commercial properties to the household waste collection teams;
- Reduction of the council's bulky household waste collection service from three to two teams from June 2008 without detrimentally impacting on service standards.

The council's credibility as a key player within the Merseyside Waste Partnership has also been greatly enhanced by the outcomes achieved from the member development and as such the council has played a key role in influencing the development of and consequently delivering the following Merseyside wide projects:

- Review of the Merseyside Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy;
- Adoption of the Merseyside Waste Management Inter Authority Agreement;
- Support to the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority's (MWDA) procurement of future waste management contracts and associated site acquisition strategy;
- Proactive contribution by the Knowsley elected member representative on the MWDA Board to the Merseyside municipal waste management agenda

In terms of value for money in relation to member development, the process has highlighted many different ways to effectively meet learning and development needs which can be utilised further in the future. The feedback from the members who took part in the new waste collection trials clearly demonstrates that this was an extremely influential and innovative learning opportunity for them.

The conclusion of the second members scrutiny committee review of waste management led to the council approving a range of new recommendations for implementation during 2009 / 10 which are targeted at achieving the LAA 30% household waste recycling target for 2009 / 10 and securing further financial efficiency savings.

Continuous Improvement

Knowsley has strived for continuous improvement at all levels of Member Training and Development for example the incremental rise of Members participating in Personal Development Planning; an improved evaluation processes; an enhanced Induction Programme; the introduction of ECDL/IT courses and a Members' Handbook

Future developments look to include accredited learning packages for Members which can be used by them in their future employment. They are also developing a better system of recording which covers all Member learning and development and a more formal evaluation processes to capture the learning be it seminar-based learning or out-and-about learning such as study and site visits.

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Summary

Warrington Borough Council successfully achieved re-accreditation to Level 1 status of the North West Charter in 2008. This gave the Democratic and Member Services team and the Councillor Development Forum confidence to commit to achieving Level 2 in November 2009.

The council's Strategic Management Board identified Corporate Parenting as an organisational priority for member training. Having reviewed its elected member training and development programme, the Councillor Development Forum agreed that corporate parenting would provide a focal point for the Level 2 Exemplar status application. In particular, it aimed to highlight the role of members in corporate parenting and the welfare of looked-after children.

The ongoing Corporate Parenting development programme for Members is an example of how

the cross-directorate approach to Member Development to address community issues enabled community level impacts.

The initiative used a variety of approaches including the provision of a specific session designed and delivered by former Looked After Children (LAC). Their skills were developed by staff in Social Care and the Youth Service, thus giving young people the confidence to present sessions.

Councillors said:

“Just a thought, at some stage of the training programme, would it be an idea for one or better still more of the young people for whom we are the Corporate Parents, to come along and talk to us about their experiences.”

Following the initial development sessions, Councillors began to identify and close policy gaps. The Corporate Parenting development project was Member-driven and the success of the development has sown the seeds for future development opportunities. The project also attracted external funding and regional attention from Local Authorities wishing to develop similar programmes.

This project created a fluid model for other Local Authorities to use to develop a personalised and

outcomes led approach to Corporate Parenting for Members. It is the council's ambition to share this development model widely with Authorities on a local and national scale.

They continue to celebrate their achievements. They were commended for their work via the 'Municipal Journal' (MJ) Awards 2009 and they were shortlisted for the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Awards 2009 for the category of 'Best elected member development initiative'

Background to the Council

Warrington Borough Council serves a population of 195,000 residents. It is a four star authority with aspirations to be

“an outstanding town in the north west with opportunities for all.”

Following a period of 25 years of Labour control, the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives jointly took control of the Council in 2006. However, despite the political change, all political parties have remained united behind the Member development programme in Warrington.

Who was involved in the Member Development Programme?

- Warrington's Councillor Development Forum
- An officer team consisting of Democratic and Member Services and Children's Services staff
- North West Employers Organisation (NWEO)
- The council's Strategic Management Board
- North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership – the local RIEP
- Former looked-after children.

Key Learning for other councils applying for Level 2

- Find out what the learning gaps are before starting so you can develop your programme appropriately.
- Engage from the outset with the regional employer's organisation.
- Talk to the right people to get the right approach: listen to your social care teams, councillors and looked-after children.
- Get buy-in from members and senior officers by adopting a sensitive approach and clearly explaining the risks and benefits of the project.
- Use your councillor development forum or equivalent to facilitate a trust-building relationship between officers and members.
- Get a team approach in coordinating the training and development.
- Record all your feedback including evaluation forms, emails, casual conversations and comments from the sessions.

Approach to the Level 2 process

The Council had a legal and moral duty to act as a parent to all children who cannot be looked after by their own parents / carers. The concept of 'Corporate Parenting' had been reinforced by the government since 1998 and had been further enhanced by high-profile cases in the media.

Nationally outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) were not positive compared to their peers and locally Members and Officers had identified issues that needed to be addressed:

Issue 1: Need to raise awareness

A baseline survey of all councillors revealed 70% of Councillors knew little or nothing about the concept of Corporate Parenting but 100% of Councillors rated it as very or fairly important to their role. Therefore there was a need for Councillors to understand the purpose of the role and how it should be undertaken. Previous attempts at hosting Corporate Parenting training had been unsuccessful so there needed to be a new approach to engage Councillors.

Issue 2: Need to develop meaningful two-way engagement

Most Councillors had not met LAC nor had any meaningful engagement with them, which meant young people's views and experiences of services were not heard or taken into account as part of decision-making or service delivery. Additionally, LAC said they did not know who their Corporate Parents were or what they did.

Issue 3: Need to develop joined-up working and minimise policy contradictions

Social Care staff had raised concerns about the need for greater joined-up working between Council directorates in delivering services to LAC. There was a greater need for scrutiny of Social Care and other services to minimise policy contradictions.

Issue 4: Need to understand the realities for Social Care staff

Members were not aware of the pressures faced by Social Care staff in trying to deliver safeguarding services and therefore had not developed policies to support staff well-being and address the issues they face in undertaking their day job.

The first task before designing the development programme was to find out what the learning gaps were so that they could develop an appropriate programme. A robust training needs analysis was developed. Councillors identified personal and organisational training and development modules.

This was done through the council's Personal Development Planning and Review process. The council listened to several groups of people, particularly its Social Care teams, councillors and looked-after children when designing the development programme.

The Development Programme was offered in two parts Universal Sessions and Specialist Sessions each with a step by step approach to learning:

Universal Sessions

Taster Sessions: To introduce the concept of Corporate Parenting to Councillors.

The aim was to facilitate a trust-building relationship between Councillors and the Head of Safeguarding.

Warrington's Councillor Development Forum was used to facilitate a trust-building relationship between officers and members. The forum represents all political parties and thus provided a unique total member buy-in. Open dialogue and honest consideration of viewpoints enabled a positive relationship.

Session 1: Introduction to Corporate Parenting

To help councillors understand the legislative context surrounding Corporate Parenting, the local implications and the significance of national statistics.

Session 2: Looked After Children's Perspective and the Corporate Parent's 'Job Description'

To understand services from the perspective of a Looked After Child. They began developing a 'job description' for the Corporate Parent role. Councillors said: "Just a thought, at some stage of the training programme, would it be an idea for one or better still more of the young people for whom we are the Corporate Parents, to come along and talk to us about their experiences"

Session 3: Senior officers and Elected Members (Shared Training)

To gain a mutual understanding of respective roles and develop practical and strategic methods of working together.

“The Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive agreed to meet regularly with the Children in Care Council to increase dialogue between young people and their Corporate Parents.”

Session 4: Social Care Staff Perspective

To understand services from the Social Care staff perspective. To understand the process for reporting child protection concerns.

Session 5: Multi-Agency Event:

To understand the role of partner agencies in safeguarding.

Specialist Sessions

Governance Committee: Introduction to legal responsibilities of Corporate Parenting and the implications for governance.

One to Ones: Councillors and Senior Officer 'one to ones' with the Head of Safeguarding.

Members' Briefings: Councillors were sent information on Corporate Parenting via the 6 weekly electronic and interactive Member Briefing document.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC):

An outline of the legal responsibilities of Corporate Parents towards UASC. In order to understand the experience of UASC in Warrington – They talked to former UASC about their experiences in Warrington and facilitated an introduction to the partner agencies involved in supporting UASC.

In Warrington's case, Democratic and Member Services worked in partnership with Children's Services in a positive and energised officer team. They were responsible for the operation and delivery of course modules. This combined skills and knowledge, and ensured a team approach to coordinating training and development.

North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership's – the local RIEP – grant of £5,000 kick-started and supported the process.

Outcomes and Impact

It was essential to record all feedback including evaluation forms, emails, casual conversations and comments from the sessions. This provided valuable evidence to measure the outcomes and impacts of the training.

Members became far better equipped to deal with decision-making processes, scrutiny requirements and partnership arrangements through the knowledge and skills gained in the development process.

The key to success was the way that elected members lead from the front – this was, and remains their programme.

Says Councillor Keith Bland, Chair of the Councillor Development Forum:

“There is a real buzz about member training in Warrington. It is a pleasure to put party politics to one side, the three political leaders and political parties have joined forces to ensure that all councillors have the skills to do the job and deliver quality services to the community.”

Outcomes and Impacts could be measured in the following ways:

Individual Impact

Councillors gained confidence to suggest changes and improvements in services for example suggesting ways in which the educational attainment of LAC could be improved.

They began reporting child protection concerns about specific children in their ward to the Safeguarding service.

In addition to the increase in knowledge there was a noticeable culture change and a change in Councillor behaviour toward Corporate Parenting. For example Corporate Parenting issues were raised in areas of the council where it has not been considered before including party group meetings, Full Council, Governance and Executive Board. Moreover Scrutiny committees identified areas of the service which needed examining.

Following a meeting with young people, Councillors had a whole group discussion to identify how they could engage better with young people and their carers. Some Councillors used their personal experiences of being in care or as foster carers to help other Councillors to identify what types of engagement were helpful / useful.

The development has resulted in a better and clearer understanding of context and knowledge base, as evidenced by information requests to Children's Services managers and how they have learnt to scrutinise, question and investigate issues and policies.

Members made better informed decisions, with a greater understanding of looked-after children's personal issues, the young people were not just seen as facts and figures and there was an improvement in debates at council meetings. They now consider the needs of looked-after children when taking decisions, for example, on the format of the new council structure.

Some Councillors put themselves forward to act as a single point of contact for young people to come to in confidence and discuss issues with them as their Corporate Parents.

Community Impact

Councillors suggested setting up a forum with foster carers to better understand their issues. These meetings were planned to take place as informal open days / coffee mornings.

Young people have been empowered through inclusion in the member development process. They have developed training skills and they have been able to present their issues directly to Councillors through the training and other mechanisms. Furthermore, this has provided them with transferable skills and in some cases, contributed to their achievement of the NVQ qualifications.

Some of the Members decided to get involved with the Leaving Care Football team.

The Authority also encouraged Care Leavers on to the Apprentice scheme, supporting the young people to work towards qualifications whilst in a job. Apprentices have also been taken on by the local ALMO. It is intended to expand the scheme to partners so the whole borough takes responsibility for supporting Care Leavers.

One councillor, in his position as a school governor, began championing the cause of looked-after children in his school.

There is now a stronger voice for looked-after children – locally, regionally and nationally.

Organisation Impact

Awareness has been raised through a joined-up approach to policy making and better scrutiny of Social Care services. This has minimised contradictions, closed gaps in policies, provided better support for young people and instigated service improvements. Trust between the head of

Safeguarding and councillors has been strengthened.

The increase in knowledge, motivated Councillors to seek further knowledge. Hence the Councillor Development Forum and the Corporate Parenting Executive Task Group jointly secured £5000 from NWIEP to ensure training could be funded for a further 12 months.

Some Councillors contacted staff in the Safeguarding Service to discuss potential ideas to improve engagement with young people and their foster carers / adoptive parents.

The Corporate Equality and Diversity Policy recognised the importance of supporting LAC ensuring they were not discriminated against. Equality Impact Assessments were also undertaken and some have focused on the impact of services on LAC.

Through undertaking the training, members made significant corporate impact:

- The Governance Committee identified that one directorate was charging LAC to use community centres and playing fields which was likened to "charging our children to play in their own back yard." Consequently, the Council no longer charges LAC to use community centres and playing fields.
- Councillors now confidently raise child protection issues identified in their wards.
- A framework outlining the responsibilities of councillors as corporate parents has been produced, incorporating a corporate parent 'job description.'
- The council's Corporate Parenting strategy has been updated to reflect recent changes.
- Full Council selected two Corporate Parent Champions who champion the needs of LAC in decision-making forums throughout the Council.
- The format of the training has been so successful that Members have asked for the provision of training be to extended to cover the safeguarding of vulnerable adults.
- The Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive agreed to meet regularly with the Children in Care Council to increase dialogue between young people and their Corporate Parents.
- Councillors began working with Officers to take a cross-directorate approach to solving issues. For example, LAC are no longer seen as just a "Children's Services issue." Councillors began to ask other Directorates how they could contribute to the agenda.
- There was an acceptance that LAC are a cross-scrutiny responsibility and not just a Children's OSC responsibility. For example the Communities OSC set up a CAMHs working group to consider the specific mental health and emotional needs of LAC.
- Councillors asked for the Corporate Parenting Executive Task Board Group to be opened up to include cross-directorate representatives, thus enabling a holistic approach to supporting LAC. There was also a suggestion to include representatives from the Children in Care Council in the group, thus enabling Councillors to test ideas with young people before implementing them.
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan was updated in recognition of cross-directorate responsibilities and to enable a pro-active response to the actions identified in the Laming Inquiry.
- Councillors identified recruitment and retention issues with respect to Social Workers and wider Social Care Staff. They noticed that staff had been unable to complete Core and Initial Assessments within timescales. As a result, they discussed ways in which the situation could be improved. Support for Social Care staff now features as part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan.
- Members recognised that they needed a greater understanding of the operational support to LAC. Therefore research was undertaken into developing Emissary Members for Social Care whereby they will be attached to and shadow specific teams to enhance their understanding of Social Work. The aim was to create and maintain a direct link between Social Care staff and Councillors and enable quicker identification of issues affecting staff.
- The training also helped Councillors to inform the Corporate Plan and specific targets relating to LAC were incorporated into the 2009 - 2012 Corporate Plan.
- More councillors came forward and felt confident to undertake quality Regulation 33 visits of residential homes
- Impact is now a standing item on every Councillor Development Forum agenda. The Forum now considers how training has affected themselves, the organisation and the community. It has become the starting point for all new training and development.

What could have been done better?

It would have helped to have 'de-cluttered' the 'Member Development Prospectus' to give councillors more time and space to focus on this important area.

The positive response by councillors to involvement as Corporate parents had not been forecast, therefore the internal procedures for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks could not cope with the demands from councillors wishing to do Regulation 33 visits.

Continuous Improvement

To ensure councillors continue with their development a tailored resource pack of information was put together to supplement the training sessions. Additionally, Corporate Parenting resource files have been placed in all the party group rooms. Occasionally, key important documents are emailed to Councillors so they have direct and immediate access to the information they need. They are also creating a tailored resource pack of information for employees and partner organisations.

It is their ambition to share the model widely with authorities on a local and national scale. In addition, they are adapting the method of development to train councillors on issues of working with vulnerable adults.

They are looking to develop a module for Members who sit on outside bodies and are doing a restructure of this with the view to rolling out similar training for managers so they understand their responsibilities better around Corporate Parenting.

Corporate Parenting will be part of induction for all new Councillors and they will organise more Regulation 33 training so more Members can go out on visits to places where LAC live.

In time they anticipate Councillors will ask partners, through the LSP, Children's Trust and other external bodies how they can contribute to the agenda thus ensuring that all Services begin working together for the benefit of young people.

In the long term, they anticipate development of the 'softer side of corporate parenting'. This will be through bringing members and looked-after children together for development and fun day sessions.

Contact for Further Information

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Q1

Personal Development Plans – How important are they to the Member Development Strategy and the success of Level 2?

Answer

Of prime importance. Without them it is difficult to get 'buy – in' from a wide Member audience and sustain progress.

Q2

How do you capture Members interest and keep them engaged?

Answer

You need key politicians to drive the agenda, good relationships between Members and Officers, a clear structure for Member development and a culture of expectation that learning is vital to doing the job well.

Q3

How do you measure the impact of Member development?

Answer

This can be done in many ways like 'Before and After' PDP interviews with concrete examples; 360 Degree feedback mechanisms including external organisations; CPA reporting; interviews with community groups; statistical evidence etc.

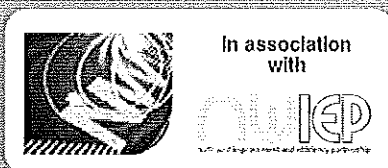
Q4

Who provides the training and development for Members?

Answer

Most learning is a mix of in-house training provided by talented Members and officers; site visits; NWEQ; IDeA Leadership Academy Programmes; Peer Coaches; knowledge experts; and joint events with other councils and partners.

Q5	What makes learning and development different at level 2?
Answer	Quite often the learning is inter-connected across service and subject areas e.g. gathering expert knowledge; bringing back information from site visits; personal trialling of a process; learning new skills to promote an issue e.g. public speaking or IT.
Q6	How did you decide on the key topic for Level 2 Assessment?
Answer	Often an ideal opportunity occurs for example when a service needs reviewing; or Members are experiencing a change to their role and need to respond to the changes quickly.
Q7	How did you find the time to do set the project up and gather evidence and measure impact?
Answer	Project working is often a part of the job now so it is important to use a real area of development, focused on who would need to be involved in the processes i.e. overview and scrutiny, stakeholders, customer focus groups and factor in things like questionnaires and face to face interviews. This approach often causes a ripple effect and more evidence flows in than expected.
Q8	How do you go about writing an application for Level 2?
Answer	Identify a real problem to be solved. Work your way through the Toolkit 'Making a Difference' as it gives lots of guidance for scoping the work. Read the Case Studies and learn from other people's experiences.



Member Development Gateway

Email: membergateway@nweo.org.uk | Telephone: 0161 214 7407

North West Employers' Organisation, 6th Floor, Delphian House, Riverside, New Bailey Street, Manchester, M3 5AP