



London Charter Plus for Elected Member Development

Brent Council

Assessment Date: 10 December 2018



Brent Council

London Charter Plus for Elected Member Development

Assessment Date: 10 December 2018

Contents	Page
Recommendation of the assessment team	1
Assessment	2
Background	4
Evidence presented and demonstrated to support the application	4
Continuous improvement and direction of travel	8

Recommendation of the Assessment Team

Brent Council has achieved and continues to meet the Charter Plus standard of the London Charter for Elected Member Development. The council has been awarded Charter Plus status for three years from 10 December 2018. The council has also committed to a process of continuous improvement over the next three years.

The council will be required to present evidence of continuing progress as part of the direction of travel in eighteen months' time and will be re-assessed in full against the Charter Plus standard in three years.

Assessment team

- Councillor Andy Hull, London Borough of Islington
- Mark Palmer, Development Director, South East Employers

Charter standards

- Commitment to councillor development and support
- The Council has a strategic approach to councillor development
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity

Assessment

The assessment against the Charter Plus standard took place on 10 December 2018. The purpose of the assessment visit was to determine whether the council continues to meet the standard of the London Charter Plus for Member Development.

The assessment was based on an analysis of a portfolio of evidence submitted in advance by the council, plus a number of interviews with key councillors, officers and partner organisations. The evidence presented in the portfolio was drawn from a wide range of sources and gave a good overview of the council's member development activities. The self-assessment was linked to the three Charter criteria, with each section having some introductory text to set the context, before highlighting specific examples of where different elements of the Charter Plus standard were met.

The assessment team was more than satisfied that the comprehensive portfolio both met and, in many areas, exceeded the Charter Plus criteria. The assessment sought examples of how the information provided could be validated and brought to life through a number of interviews.

During the assessment visit, interviews were held with the following:

◆ **Councillors**

- Councillor Ihtesham Afzal, Councillor Workshop
- Councillor Amer Agha, Councillor Workshop
- Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council & Member Development Steering Group Chair
- Councillor Reg Colwill, Conservative Group Leader, Member Development Steering Group
- Councillor Tariq Dar, Councillor Workshop
- Councillor Faduma Hassan, Member Development Steering Group
- Councillor Sandra Kabir, Labour Group Chief Whip & Member Development Steering Group
- Councillor Robert Johnson, Councillor Workshop
- Councillor Margaret McLennan, Deputy Leader of the Council
- Councillor Shama Tatler, Councillor Workshop

◆ **Officers**

- Carolyn Downs, Chief Executive
- Peter Gadsdon, Director, Performance Policy and Partnerships
- Tom Cattermole, Head of Executive & Member Services
- Michelle Sylva, Member Support Officer
- Regina McDonald, Executive Support Manager

◆ **Partner Organisations**

- Jacqueline Carr, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Brent
- Atara Fridler, Chief Executive, Crisis Brent skylight Director
- Dr Melanie Smith, Director of Public Health

Arrangements for the assessment day were good and the assessment visit was well structured, enabling the assessment team to acquire the information needed for the assessment to be thorough and representative. Everyone interviewed demonstrated a clear commitment to elected member development and were open in the sharing of information. All councillors interviewed as part of the assessment process spoke of how much they recognised and valued the dedicated support available to them.

Background

Brent Council originally achieved Charter recognition in October 2010. The council was re-accredited on 8 January 2014 and became the *first* council in London to achieve Charter Plus accreditation on 10 September 2015. The council then committed to a process of continuous improvement over the next three years.

Evidence presented and demonstrated to support the application

▪ Commitment to councillor development and support

The assessment team was pleased to see that there continued to be very strong political and organisational support for member development. During the 2015 assessment the level of councillor support for member development was acknowledged as a key strength and the assessment team were now of the view that this commitment had further increased and there was a genuine culture of member development that was led from the top by the Leader and had the buy in of most councillors.

At the elections in May/June 2018, eighteen of the members of the council were newly elected and member development led by the Steering Group was effectively prioritised. This included a comprehensive induction programme was put in place that recognised the demands placed on councillors. The introduction of a mentoring and peer support programme within the Labour Group and a programme of Be A Councillor events drawing on LGA best practice.

Supporting and promoting local democracy had a high profile including a programme of events during Local Democracy Week, an active Brent Youth Parliament and a takeover day to support young people's discussions with councillors and officers.

The Council has a sustainable budget for member development of £17,000 that is monitored, and its use is prioritised by the Member Development Steering Group. The Council Leader acknowledged that because of the importance of member development further financial support for member development was available should a business case be presented and supported by the Member Development Steering Group.

The Member Development Steering Group has a high-profile comprising political group leaders, the chief whip and newly elected councillors and ensures that member development is genuinely member led.

Comments that we heard:

“The Leader plays a key role in driving member development.”

“Our continued success as a Council is dependent on having councillors with the skills and expertise to carry out their role”

“The Member Development Steering Group is highly valued in leading our successful approach to member development”

“As a new councillor I have had a high level of support, all my development needs have been prioritised and met”

“The group mentoring programme has been extremely beneficial for newly elected councillors”

▪ **Strategic approach to councillor development**

The council had a strategic approach to member development led by the Member Development steering Group and supported by key officers within the Executive and Member Services Team. The assessment team was informed that the strategic approach commenced from the Be A Councillor programme and was further built upon by the structured induction programme for new councillors that was also attended by virtually all Councillors. Councillor support was further embedded through the provision of excellent ICT support and the provision of iPads and iPhones for all councillors.

The council had a revised member development Strategy and Vision Statement in place developed by the Member Development Steering Group and complimenting the Brent Borough Plan.

Following the May/June 2018 elections (June- August) the council provided all members with the opportunity to undertake a Personal Development Plan as a part of a comprehensive Members Needs Analysis. Twenty- Seven members participated in the Members Needs Analysis including fourteen of the seventeen newly elected councillors. The Member Needs Analysis included a one to one discussion leading to the development of a Personal Development Plan and the opportunity for self- assessment against the LGA Political Skills Framework. The Member Needs Analysis also shaped the member learning and development programme led by the Steering Group.

The council has developed role profiles for each key role and these have been updated to reflect the changing role and expectations of the councillor role.

The council has a structured approach to leadership development and a positive approach to cabinet succession planning with several of the 2014 intake of councillors accelerated to Lead Member portfolios as part of an expanded cabinet. The commitment to leadership development has given all new cabinet

members the opportunity to participate on the LGA Leadership Academy and LGA leadership modules. The cabinet is further supported through a cabinet mentor programme and a commitment to CMT and Cabinet away days.

The representatives from the key partner organisations informed the assessment team that the collaboration between councillors and partners was excellent and there was a genuine sense of real partnership working. Partners had been engaged in several Scrutiny reviews particularly in the area of housing and issues of public health e.g. childhood obesity. The partner organisations were of the view that the development support provided had been pivotal in ensuring councillors had the skills and knowledge to support collaborative working and to ensure genuine scrutiny and accountability.

Comments that we heard:

“The PDP process has been instrumental in capturing the skills and development needs of new members.”

“The commitment to PDP’s has been pivotal in embedding the culture of member development.”

“Leadership development is more co-ordinated and has supported the successful approach to succession planning.”

“As a key partner we have an excellent relationship with councillors that has improved with each passing year”

▪ **Learning and development is effective in building capacity**

Member development has been pivotal in providing councillors with the skills to deliver the corporate and strategic priorities of the council and member development has supported performance improvement and led to more effective scrutiny and accountability both internally and externally.

The council has continued to develop and improve the approach to evaluation and continuous improvement although both members and officers recognised that more focus needed to be placed on evaluating the impact of member development in terms of benefit for the Council, Councillor and Community. The council had recently participated in an in-depth case study supported by South East Employers that did identify the benefits of the investment in member development.

The council is currently developing an IOS App to support improved evaluation immediately after an event and to get more effective real time feedback on the benefits and application of learning.

The assessment team was of the view that the Member Development Steering Group should give greater focus to the evaluation and identifying and promoting the benefits of member development.

There are effective processes in place for disseminating, sharing and exchanging knowledge and learning. This includes the Members Informal Bulletin, promoting LGA Political Leadership events and events commissioned by the LGIU. Councillors with specific responsibilities are supported by the Chief Whip and Member Services Officers to identify development opportunities that will support them in their role.

The council through the Member Development Steering Group has a commitment to identifying and implementing improvements to learning and development activities. This has included the Steering Group taking forward and beginning to implement the recommendations identified as part of the Member Development Needs Analysis (September 2018) and revising the Member Learning and Development Strategy /Vision Statement to ensure that it is forward looking and fit for purpose.

Comments that we heard:

“We are committed to continuous improvement in respect of member development.”

“Evaluation of the impact of member development is difficult and it is something that the Steering Group needs to focus on next year (2019).”

“We actively sign post members to appropriate training and development opportunities particularly if they have a specific responsibility.”

“Member development is providing councillors with the skills and knowledge to do the job effectively and ensure both internal and external accountability”

“The member development has improved communication between members and officers and also our confidence and ability to communicate with our local communities on around difficult and challenging issues”

Continuous improvement and direction of travel

Brent Council has been successful in continuing to meet the Charter Plus standard and is well placed to demonstrate continuous improvement over the next three years. The assessment team was of the view that the Charter Plus application and assessment had been very strong and there had been a significant step change and improvement since the September 2015 assessment

Key Strengths identified by the assessors

The following areas were felt by the assessors to be strengths:

- There is continued and developing top political and management commitment to member development. The Leader clearly demonstrated an enthusiasm for and strategic commitment to member development, which was like in 2015 echoed by all the members we met. Organisation. This is complimented by the highly valued officer support undertaken through the Executive and Member Services team. *Without doubt there is now an embedded culture of member development symptomatic of a learning organisation.*
- The Member Development Steering Group continues to have a high profile and reflects the current two political groups, group leaders and both experienced and newly elected councillors. The Steering Group is both strategic in focus, exercises a high level of influence and ensures that the learning and development programme is member led and reflects the priorities of all councillors.
- ***“Partnership working has moved from the rhetorical to the actual”***. Partner organisations recognised the string and developing links with the council and councillors and spoke highly of involvement and interaction at the ward level and through the overview and scrutiny process.
- The ‘Be A Councillor’ programme was highly successful and involved over 100 attendees and supported the promotion of local democracy as well as encouraging individuals to put themselves forward as prospective councillors.
- The Member Needs Analysis and Personal Development Planning programme (PDP) has been further developed and supported the identification and prioritisation of member development needs. The programme was particularly successful in engaging fourteen of the seventeen newly elected councillors. This is supported by a comprehensive member development programme which responds to individual needs and demonstrates clear links to strategic priorities.

- Member development is supported by a sustainable budget of £17,000 and the Member Development Steering Group ensure accountability of the use of the budget.
- The Labour Group has an effective mentoring programme in place led by trained member mentors providing peer support to new and more experienced councillors. Cabinet members are supported with external mentoring support through the LGA.
- There is a strong commitment to a structured approach to cabinet succession planning supported by an effective leadership development strategy. The council has a commitment to supporting councillors to attend LGA Leadership Academy, Next Generation and single leadership modules.
- The Member Development Strategy and Vision Statement and the development programme compliment and support the key strategic priorities of the organisation and ensure councillors have the skills and knowledge to deliver the priorities and ensure accountability and scrutiny.

Assessors' suggested improvement areas

The following were identified by the assessors as areas that the council should work on over the next three years. They will act as a focus for the direction of travel to take forward member development and will compliment other initiatives and approaches led by the council.

- The Member Development Steering Group to focus on “maintaining momentum” and increasing councillor engagement in member development through participation at events and workshops and through a review of PDPs mid-term and to set new individual development priorities for councillors. The council should continue to work towards a target of 60-70% participation in the PDP process.
- The Member Development Steering Group to have a more proactive focus on evaluation of member development and identifying the impact of member development both internally and externally. This should complement the introduction of the evaluation IOS App that is been launched.
- The council should continue to support the strategic approach to leadership development both for Cabinet members and for all councillors as community leaders. Leadership development should continue to support cabinet succession planning.
- The Council should further develop the e-learning resources and begin to introduce and look to develop webinars to respond to the different learning styles of councillors. There is an opportunity to take this forward on a pan London basis or with several partner councils to share and mitigate the development cost.

- The council should consider more effectively differentiating between training and development sessions and more concise member briefings, although both develop knowledge and skills, they have different learning objectives and a different level of commitment is required from councillors participating.
- There should be the opportunity to focus development in how to work effectively with and influence external organisations. e.g. Transport for London, Thames Water and Government Departments. This will be particularly beneficial in supporting councillors in the wards with case work and in exerting influence through the overview and scrutiny committees and task groups.
- The Member Development Steering Group should continue to draw together examples of best practice in member development across the council and other Boroughs and partner organisations. This can be drawn externally from network meetings, leadership development activities and pan London forums. Identified good practice should be utilised to support improvement to the member development offer across the council.
- The council should identify opportunities to further improve formal/informal dialogue and relationships with partner organisations. This may include involving partners as participants on member development workshops where applicable and relevant in order to enhance collaboration.

The council may identify further key areas for improvement because of this assessment or any ongoing review of the development programme.

South East Employers would like to meet with the council in eighteen months to evaluate the programme of continuous improvement and direction of travel; and in three years for a reassessment.

The assessment process may be subject to a quality assurance review by the Local Government Association.

We look forward to the council supporting South East Employers in promoting the benefits of Charter Plus to councils across the London region.

The Council may continue to use the national elected member development Charter Plus logo.

Congratulations in continuing to meet the London Charter Plus standard!

Mark Palmer

Development Director

South East Employers for and on behalf of the Assessment Team

11 January 2019