



**South East Charter Plus for Elected Member Development**

**Kent County Council**

**Assessment Date: 17 September 2014**

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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Recommendation of the assessment team	1
Assessment	2
Member Development Steering Group	4
Evidence presented and demonstrated to support the application	5
Continuous improvement and direction of travel	8

## **Recommendation of the Assessment Team**

Kent County Council meets and has achieved the standard of the South East Charter Plus for Elected Member Development. The council has been awarded Charter Plus status for three years from 17 September 2014.

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 standards in three years.

### **Assessment team**

- Cllr Gareth Barnard, Cabinet Member Children's Services, Bracknell Forest Council (Member Assessor)
- Mark Palmer, Development Director, SEE (Lead Assessor)
- Joanna Boaler, Head of Democratic Services, Essex County Council (Officer Assessor)

### **Charter Plus standards**

- Commitment to Councillor development
- Strategic approach to Councillor development
- Learning and development is effective in building capacity
- Supporting Councillors in their role as leaders of their local communities

## Assessment

The assessment against the Charter Plus standard took place on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The purpose of the assessment visit was to determine whether or not the authority met the Charter and Charter Plus standard. The assessment was based on an analysis of a portfolio of evidence submitted in advance by the council, a number of interviews with key personnel and members to verify the presented evidence and to identify the council's forward plans for continuous improvement.

The following people were seen during the assessment visit:

### Interview 1: Key Officers

- ◆ Mr Paul Wickenden, Democratic Services Manager (Members)
- ◆ Mrs Coral Ingleton, Learning and Development Manager

### Interview 2: Head of Paid Service

- ◆ Mr David Cockburn

### Interview 3:

- ◆ Cllr Paul Carter CBE Leader of the Council
- ◆ Cllr Gary Cooke, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Democratic Services

### Group Session 1: with Partner Organisations

- ◆ Cllr Roger Gough
- ◆ Mr Stuart Beaumont
- ◆ Mr Mike Campbell
- ◆ Mr Ian Ayres

### Group Session 2: Member Development Steering Group

- ◆ Cllr Andrew Bowles
- ◆ Cllr Richard Parry
- ◆ Cllr Alex King
- ◆ Cllr Paulina Stockell
- ◆ Cllr Tom Maddison
- ◆ Cllr Brian Clark

### Group Session 3: Opposition Members

- ◆ Cllr Roger Lachford – Leader of the Opposition Group
- ◆ Cllr Martin Whybrow – Leader of the Independent Group
- ◆ Cllr Gordon Cowan – Leader of the Labour Group (telephone)
- ◆ Cllr Martin Vye – Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group (telephone)

#### Group Session 4: 360 Degree Pilot Group

- ◆ Cllr Alex King
- ◆ Cllr Andrew Bowles
- ◆ Cllr Paulina Stockell
- ◆ Cllr Tom Maddison
- ◆ Cllr Richard Parry
- ◆ Cllr Ann Allen
- ◆ Cllr Gary Cooke
- ◆ Cllr John Simmonds
- ◆ Cllr Eric Hotson

Kent County Council made a commitment to the South East Charter for Member Development in September 2007 and was granted the Charter in September 2010 and subsequently awarded Charter Plus status in September 2011. The council was successfully re-assessed for Charter Plus in September 2014.

The project management and officer support of the Charter was assigned to Paul Wickendon, Democratic Services Manager and Coral Ingleton, Learning and Development Manager who supported the Member Development Steering Group. This approach ensured that there was effective support to the members responsible for promoting and leading improvement in member development. All councillors interviewed as part of the assessment process spoke of how much they recognised and valued the officer support available to them.

The council presented the assessment team with a portfolio of evidence to support its Charter Plus application. The evidence presented in the portfolio was drawn from a wide range of sources and gave a good overall view of member development activities. It was linked to the relevant Charter Plus standards.

The planning and co-ordination of the assessment visit was well structured and courteous, enabling the team to acquire the information needed for the assessment to be thorough and representative. The Assessment Team were made to feel welcome throughout the assessment.

## **Member Development Steering Group**

The Member Development Steering Group played the key role in ensuring that the Charter Plus accreditation process was member led and was accountable to the council. Its membership is representative of the whole authority:-

- Cllr Andrew Bowles
- Cllr Richard Parry
- Cllr Alex King
- Cllr Paulina Stockell
- Cllr Gary Cooke
- Cllr Ann Allen
- Cllr Angela Harrison
- Cllr Tom Maddison
- Cllr Brian Clark

The role of the Member Development Steering Group was articulated to the assessors on the assessment day. Its responsibilities include:

1. To champion and promote the development of Members
2. To regularly review the Member Training and Development Strategy to ensure its relevance.
3. To agree the Members' training and development plan annually including induction programmes in appropriate years.
4. To monitor and evaluate the development programme for Members on an annual basis.
5. To support and encourage Members in maintaining the Member Development Charter Plus
6. To report to the Council annually on progress of Member development.

## **Evidence presented and demonstrated to support the application**

### **▪ Commitment to Councillor development**

The lead officer for member development at Kent County Council is the Democratic Services Manager (Members) who has specific responsibility for co-ordinating members' learning and development. The lead officer supports the Member Development Steering Group and has specific responsibility for overseeing member learning and Personal Development Planning (PDP's).

The Council has over a number of years provided budgeted funding for elected member training and development. In 2014/15 a substantial member development budget of £30,000 is available to support member activities across the council. The budget makes the best use of resources and accommodates development needs of all members.

It was clear that the Member Development Steering Group worked together well and maintained member development as a high profile activity across the council. Members elected to the council in May 2013 spoke of the high quality induction that they received and confirmed that all new members were informed about member learning as part of their induction, there was also evidence of a number of communications to ensure participation and support for and attendance at particular events.

Senior Management commitment to member learning was evidenced through the provision of officer and budget support as outlined above and the committed support of officers to developing PDP's. There was evidence in the portfolio and from the interview with David Cockburn, Head of Paid Service of senior management commitment to member development.

### **Things that we heard:**

"Member needs are identified quickly to enable members to get up to speed quickly"

"New members were made very welcome"

"There is a culture of member development and learning at Kent"

"Member Development Steering Group is highly regarded by the Cabinet and other members"

"Excellent officer support is provided"

## ▪ **Strategic approach to Councillor development**

The council's member development framework makes it clear that development activities should address elected members individual development needs, priorities and emerging issues and concerns. Development activity should always take account of the rapidly changing external policy and operational environment and consequent emerging council priorities and organisational requirements. A new induction programme was developed for the May 2013 elections. The Member Development Steering Group oversaw the development of the induction programme for the 2013 elections and are preparing for the 2017 elections with an event taking place for prospective councillors during Local Democracy Week in October 2014.

A formal personal development plan process has been adopted and rolled out with 83% of members having a PDP in place. A trial of 360 degree feedback has started with over 20 members involved. Members were generally enthusiastic in undertaking personal development discussions and 360 degree feedback believing that it brought real insight into areas for improvement and in developing skills, helping members to 'see themselves as others see them'.

The council demonstrated that it operates a structured and timely approach to promoting development opportunities. Members that the assessors spoke to, confirmed that they receive sufficient notice of development sessions to allow them to plan in advance and that training is regular and provided through different methods including face-to-face sessions, recording sessions, webinars and e-learning.

The council is already undertaking some learning activities with district councils across Kent. It was clear that Kent County Council has been the lead partner in this development and were keen to develop this further and to make best use of twin hatted members.

The council's 2013 in-house induction process was thorough, well organised and well received. Members expressed appreciation for the high level of support available to them and acknowledged that this had helped them during their initial weeks and months in office enabling them to get up-to speed quickly.

### **Things that we heard:**

"Members are well informed and skilled-up"

"Member development is a team effort – officers and members"

"Induction and on-going development has been a huge help to new members"



“The member development programme is flexible and adaptable”

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

The council’s officers and members were clear that member development has improved the performance of individual members, of functions, and the council as a whole, and were able to give tangible examples of benefits. This was very evident from the Member Development Steering Group and at the 360 degree pilot group. Members were particularly pleased with the recent Adult Social Care development sessions and the INLOGOV training that Strategic Commissioning.

The assessors heard that member development is discussed in political groups and on a one-to-one basis demonstrating a supportive learning culture.

The assessors learnt that Kent County Council is planning to review the Member Development offer with a view to gaining accreditation for the programme. Throughout the day members were supportive and enthusiastic of the benefits in doing so.

**Things that we heard:**

“The recent training session was the best session I have attended”

“Development enables an informed debate with all members able to contribute”

“We’re keen for accreditation”

- **Supporting Councillors in their role as leaders of their local communities**

The council is aware of the changing role of the elected member and has and will provide a series of bespoke and on-going events for all elected members at the council transforms. The assessment team were told about four events provided by INLOGOV in September 2014 which aimed to help, members understand their role in leading and responding to their local communities and contributing to the decision making process.

It was noted by the assessors that the council is considering further use of e-learning and webinars to enable members to access information when they cannot come into the Council Offices.

Members explained to the assessment team that the Council had a presence at the Kent County Show and asked members of the public whether they had considered standing as a councillor. During Local Democracy Week in October 2014 there is an open day for those who have expressed an interest in becoming a councillor, where they will be able to find out more about what the role entails.

### **Continuous improvement and direction of travel**

Kent County Council has been successful in achieving and in exceeding the standards of Charter Plus. The following areas were felt by the assessors to be particular strengths:

- There is top political and managerial commitment and delivery of member development
- There are clear links to member development in strategic priorities
- There is strong officer support and commitment to member development and good member officer relationships
- The profile of the member development steering group is high, has high energy and is of high calibre and is seen as effective
- There has been a respected and effective induction programme
- The recent Peer Review evidenced good member development
- There is evidence of partner engagement and benefits of member development
- The PDP take-up is high and is cross party
- The council is adaptable and flexible with learning styles
- The council have piloted 360 degree feedback and the MDSG have applied learning.

### **Assessors' suggested improvement areas:**

The following are areas that Kent County Council could work towards over the next three years. They will act as a focus for the direction of travel to take forward member development. The council may also identify further key areas for improvement during this time to reflect the changing and emerging priorities of the council

- To build strategic commissioning role of members, namely in the following areas:
  - Skills
  - Competencies and behaviours
  - Refresh of the councillor role profiles
- Develop a more strategic approach to engagement and development with District Councils and further consider the role of twin hatted members as a catalyst for change.
- Move forward with the accreditation of the member development programme
- Evaluate take-up and use of Knet and promote its use as part of the self-service approach
- 2017 – Further develop the future councillor programme through promotion and advertising of the role of the Kent councillor.

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. We look forward to Kent County Council supporting South East Employers in promoting the benefits of the Charter to councils across the South East region. The council may use the national elected member development charter logo.

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

**Congratulations on achieving and exceeding the Charter Plus standard and we look forward to reviewing your progress in 18 months.**

**Mark Palmer  
Development Director  
South East Employers for and on behalf of the Assessment Team  
September 2014**