

By: Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Organisational Development Manager

To: Selection Committee – 10 October 2007

Subject: The South East Charter for Elected Member Development

Introduction

1. (1) The South East Charter has been developed in partnership with the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA) and is based on a charter successfully developed in the North West of England building on the experience of the North West Employers Charter and successful regional Member Development Charter.

(2) Following consultation with the three political party Leaders the Leaders formally took part in a signing ceremony on 6 September to demonstrate the County Council's commitment to achieving the South East Charter by April 2009.

The Charter – what is it and why do we need it?

2. (1) Any local authority dedicated to meeting the needs of its communities must be committed to developing its elected Members. The improvement agenda has placed increasing emphasis on an authority's need to rethink their approach to Member support and development. The impact is such that a majority of local authorities across the South East now have some form of support programme in place – however, the approach, levels of commitment, effectiveness and progress varies considerably.

(2) The South East Charter, therefore, has a number of objectives:-

- a) being fully committed to developing elected Members in order to achieve the Council's aims and objectives;
- b) adopting a Member-led strategic approach to Elected Member Development;
- c) having a Member learning and development plan in place that clearly identifies the difference development activities will make;
- d) seeing that learning and development is effective in building capacity; and
- e) addressing wider development matters to promote work life balance and citizenship.

How does the Charter work?

3. (1) There are a number of steps in working towards the South East Charter for Elected Member Development.

(2) The first step in the process is to undertake a self assessment against the Charter criteria. Based on that self assessment we will develop an Action Plan. This action plan will be considered by the Member Steering Group which has been established to oversee the work of officers in taking this initiative forward to achieve Charter status. Once the Member Steering Group are satisfied with the Assessment and Action Plan the agreement of the South East Employers organisation will be sought.

(3) When the County Council considers it has everything in place to demonstrate it has achieved the Charter we will inform the South East Employers organisation who will make a judgement on whether the authority is ready for assessment.

(4) An onsite assessment is carried out by a small trained team of elected Members/officers of South East Employers. A report will be sent to the Council following the assessment visit outlining good practice, areas for improvement and whether it has achieved Charter status.

(5) When the County Council has achieved the Charter the County Council will receive a certificate/award at an annual celebration event.

(6) The Charter has a lifespan of three years after which the County Council will be required to submit details of how it has sustained the standard. This once again will be judged by a trained team of elected Members and officers undertaking a desktop review.

Next steps

4. (1) As the Committee with overall responsibility for Member development periodic reports will be made to this Committee on the progress being made towards Charter status. To take the Charter forward there is a requirement that a Member Steering Group is established. I have liaised with the three political groups over the establishment of this Steering Group and Mrs Stockell, Mr Parry, Ms Harrison and Mrs Dean have been nominated to serve on this Steering Group. The Committee are asked to agree and endorse the membership of this Member Steering Group.

(2) The Member Steering Group will be supported by an officer steering group lead by ourselves. This group will do the day to day work, gathering evidence, reporting to the Member Steering Group as a reference group. When it is considered that the County Council has everything in place to demonstrate it has achieved the Charter the Member Steering Group will be asked to approve the evidence and take the decision to notify the South East Employers so that the onsite assessment process can commence.

(3) Several of the criterion on which evidence will be required will require Member input to take the assessment process forward before the County Council can write to South East Employers inviting them to make the onsite assessment.

(4) The inaugural meeting of the Member Steering Group is to take place immediately after the meeting of this Committee.

Recommendation

5. The Committee are asked to:-
- a) approve the establishment of the Member Steering Group;
 - b) endorse its membership; and
 - c) note that periodic reports by the Member Steering Group will be made to this Committee.

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Background Information: *Include ALL background information taken into account in preparing the report. (This does not include previous Committee Reports)*