

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

21st September 2009

1. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER

Report of the Clerk.

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority signs up to the West Midlands Member Development Charter and elects to work towards the Primary Level;
- 1.2 THAT the Authority nominates two Members and two officers to act as Charter assessors for the Member Development Charter.
- 1.3 THAT a Member Development Working Group be established to progress this work.
- 1.4 THAT the Chair of the Member Development Working Group be nominated to represent the Authority on the West Midlands Member Development Steering Group.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks the approval of the Authority to sign up to the West Midlands Member Development Charter.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Member development plays an important role in helping Councillors (individually and collectively) to achieve a high level of corporate governance and to effectively undertake their various roles.
- 3.2 Quality of governance is measured by the CAA Use of Resources Assessment. The assessment criteria link to the six principles of good governance as set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Governance Framework. The Audit Committee has recently assessed the Authority against this framework for the purposes of the annual Governance Statement. There is evidence of substantial compliance with the requirements of the framework with regard to member training and development, but also potential for improvement which could be addressed by working towards the Member Development Charter.

3.3 For the purposes of the UOR assessment, auditors would expect to see evidence of the following with regard to member training and development:

- Constructive working relationships between members, the corporate management team and staff
- A thorough induction for members, tailored to their role and refreshed as appropriate when their roles changed
- The Authority provides a full range of development opportunities for members, including training on the fire and rescue context, and supports members in identifying and addressing their own development needs e.g. annual personal development plans
- A high take up of training and development opportunities by all members including longstanding members
- Evaluation of the success of member training

3.4 The Charter is a statement of an Authority's commitment to developing and supporting its elected Members. Its aims are for local authorities (and joint authorities) to adopt a structured approach to Member development and to building Member capacity, which directly contributes and impacts on the performance improvement of the Authority.

3.5 Authorities achieving Charter status will be expected to demonstrate that they continue to maintain high standards in member training and development and are subject to re-assessment every three years.

3.6 The West Midlands Member Development Charter is operated through the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and authorities that undertake Charter work are supported by a lead officer from the WMLGA.

3.7 In the West Midlands, the following local authorities are signed up to charter:-

- Coventry City Council (Primary status)
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Full status)
- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (currently being re-assessed for Full status)
- Wolverhampton City Council (Primary status)

- 3.8 It is understood that the remaining home authorities have systems in place for Member Development which satisfies many of the processes looked for in the Charter and are considering signing up.
- 3.9 In terms of other Fire and Rescue Authorities the following have been awarded the Member Development Charter through their respective regional organisations:-
- East Sussex Fire and Rescue
 - Suffolk Fire and Rescue
 - Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue
 - Lancashire Fire and Rescue
 - Hampshire Fire and Rescue
- 3.10 An Authority may choose to work towards achieving the Full Charter status or elect to work towards the Primary Level (a key initial stage which ensures the local authority has the fundamental building blocks in place, before progressing towards the Full Charter). It is proposed that the Authority elects to work towards the Primary Level. Details of the process are attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.11 As part of the agreement to sign up to the Charter the Authority needs to nominate two Members and two officers to act as Charter assessors who would need to undertake appropriate training at the Authority's expense and be prepared to carry out peer assessments in other West Midlands authorities as and when required. Details of the person qualities for Charter assessors are attached as Appendix 2.
- 3.12 If the Authority agrees to sign up to the Charter it is proposed that the work be progressed by the establishment of a Member/officer Working Group comprising of:-
- Chairman of the Authority
 - Lead Member for Human Resources
 - Four Backbench Members representing all Political Parties
 - Clerk Representative
 - Chief Fire Officer Representative
- 3.13 It is proposed that the Chair of the Member Development Working Group be nominated to represent the Authority on the West Midlands Member Development Steering Group. The West Midlands Member Development Steering Group ensures a widespread commitment to the principles of Member Development as a key means of improving the performance of local authorities.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report and initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The matters contained in this report do not relate to a policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

It will be necessary to identify resources to support any expansion of Member training and the cost of assessor training, travel and associated expenses of assessors.

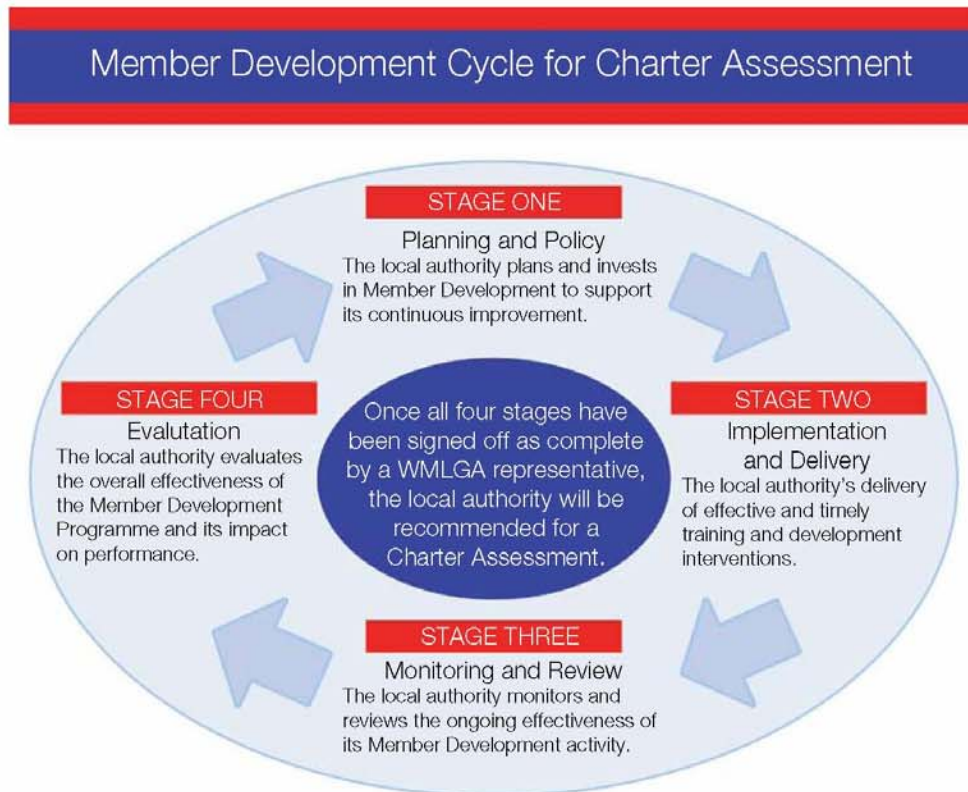
Background Papers

West Midlands Local Government Association – A Guide to the West Midlands Member Development Charter

Audit Commission – Use of Resources Auditor Guidance (effective April 2008)

SUSAN PHELPS
CLERK

The Charter Model



The **Full Charter** is achieved by working through the Member Development Cycle, demonstrated above. The approach is based on the well recognised and utilised learning cycle model of four key stages:

- Stage One – Planning and Policy
- Stage Two – Implementation and Delivery
- Stage Three – Monitoring and Review
- Stage Four – Evaluation

Critically, an authority needs to be able to demonstrate comprehensive evidence in relation to all stages of the cycle before a Charter Assessment team will be deployed.

How it works in practice – The Primary Level

The following outlines the key stages in working towards the **Primary Level** of the Charter.

- i) Following the sign up of the local authority, (demonstrating the authority's commitment to work towards achieving the Charter), the WMLGA lead officer will visit the local authority lead officer/steering group, to explain the Charter model, the requirements on the local authority in relation to each stage of the member development cycle, and to clarify the specific requirements in relation to the Primary Level and how this differs to the Full Charter award.
- ii) Following the initial meeting, the authority will be encouraged to carry out a self assessment against the assessment focus criteria for the Primary Level. The WMLGA lead officer will then provide advice to the local authority on the basis of the self assessment, resulting in the development of an agreed action plan.
- iii) Follow up visits will be agreed against key milestones of the action plan. The WMLGA lead officer will be available to provide ongoing advice and guidance, drawing on emerging practice within and outside the region; and through the organisation and delivery of focused development activities in support of the Charter requirements.
- iv) Once there is agreement between the local authority and the WMLGA lead officer that all key stages of the cycle have been completed and can be evidenced, a small assessment team comprising of the WMLGA lead officer, and one elected member will be deployed to carry out the on site assessment. Please see separate guidance relating to the assessment process.
- v) Following the award of the Primary Charter, the authority will be encouraged to develop an action plan (building on the feedback from their Primary assessment) detailing how the authority will work towards achieving the Full Charter.

Personal Qualities – Charter Assessors

The following qualities are the desired requirements for both officers and councillors who are, (as part their authorities commitment in signing up to achieving the West Midlands Member Development Charter) considering becoming one of their authorities four nominated Charter Assessors.

In order to make sure an assessment is carried out to a high standard, assessors will be expected to display the following skills and competences.

Personal skills

- Good listening and interpretative skills.
- Good analytical skills, objectivity and openness to new ideas.
- Ability to motivate and work effectively as part of a team and facilitate co-operation between individuals and groups.
- Communicate information clearly, succinctly and persuasively across different media (i.e. reports, presentations, emails and meetings).
- Ability to review, absorb and assess written and other information quickly and objectively.
- Capacity to share learning and develop others by creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment and by demonstrating a personal commitment to continual development and learning.
- Ability to work alongside others to achieve a common purpose through valuing the contributions of others.
- Valuing diverse viewpoints.

Professional skills and experience

- Understanding of the background and principles of the Member Development Charter.
- Ability to demonstrate a current understanding of Unitary, Metropolitan, County or District Councils and how they operate.
- Ability to understand and adapt to the local differences within authorities, such as, roles, responsibilities, structures.
- Ability to plan and organise work to meet required timetables and keep people on track.
- Ability to work with people from all political backgrounds.

Payment of expenses/allowances for assessors

Each authority would be responsible for financing its nominated assessor(s) as and when appointed to an assessment team, including travel costs and expenses.

In exceptional circumstances, where financing is not available, the WMLGA will seek to find a resolution where appropriate to do so.

Time commitment

All assessors are expected to participate in no more than one assessment per year.

The time commitment for a Charter Assessor will be **3 days**.

- ½ day advance reading
- 1 day assessor preparation
- 1 day onsite visit
- ½ day consensus meeting

An assessor preparation day will be held prior to the onsite visit.

Reading material for both the onsite visit and the assessor preparation day will be made available once the assessment timetable has been confirmed.

Who do I contact

If you have any questions about becoming a West Midlands Member Development Charter Assessor please contact Nano Hill on 0121 678 1021.