The Councillor Charter Development

Charter and Charter Plus

Supporting continuing professional development for councillors

Foreword

The role of a councillor is a unique, complex, yet privileged position that can make a real difference to people's lives by focussing on improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

Effective councillors can help to change the world – or at least their part of it. However, it is not easy in today's working environment for a councillor to be effective. More than ever before, councillors' role as political, civic and community leaders requires visible, responsive and resilient leadership as we advocate on behalf of residents, work accountably and innovatively and help shape places in which people want to live, work and play.

Democracy and decision-making are strengthened when councillors are empowered to speak to, and for, communities and to support the effective business of local government. If we are to continue to meet the expectations of those we serve, in an ever-changing world, we need to make sure we have the skills and expertise to carry out our duties.

The Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus provides councils with a robust framework, that is flexible to local needs, ensures effective leadership, equips members with the support they need, and provides resilience in times of challenge.

The council I am part of, Belfast City Council, is accredited to the Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus standards. I know therefore from first-hand experience the benefits of this guidance in helping councils build an even more effective and positive approach to ensuring all councillors are developed and supported to be effective in their roles.

The Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus are part of NILGA's coordinated approach to sector-led improvement across local government, supporting councils to continue their own improvement journey, take up our support tools and offers and contribute to the improvement of local government as a whole.

I know today that local government is more committed to investing in councillors' growth and development, and I strongly encourage all councils to adopt and maintain the Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus – benchmarks of your improvement journey. Continued professional development is important for effective democracy and good governance, and I hope NILGA Charter councils will inspire the next generation of councillors and political leaders to stand for election and make a clear difference for the people we serve.

Values and Purposes

Learning and development is an important tool for councils, councillors and officers to deliver what our communities need. Inspiring local communities and ensuring the wellbeing of the people and places we represent takes ambitious leadership – and effective political leadership is at the heart of a healthy democracy; with councillors who are well equipped and supported, resilient in times of challenge or usual business/service provision is disrupted and/or has to be delivered in a new/different way, and confident to make a difference, deliver and be trusted.

The Charter and Charter Plus helps councils to support councillor development and recognises those that have built an effective approach.

This document will take you through:

- Benefits of achieving the charter and charter plus
- Resource of commitments involved
- Details of each element and the requirements to achieve the charter
- The types of evidence you could use

The framework in this document gives concise and clear guidance on how to achieve the charter without being too onerous or overly bureaucratic.

The charter is flexible and focuses positively and supportively on what councils already have in place.

There is a strong emphasis on a local approach to a national framework. Rather than dictating a council's strategy, content or delivery mechanisms, the emphasis is on ensuring that all councillors are appropriately developed and supported to be effective in their roles.

The Charter and Charter Plus are also based on the principles of sector-led improvement, whereby councils:

- Are responsible for their own performance
- Are accountable locally, not nationally
- Have a sense of collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as whole
- Can access support and tools from NILGA and regional organisations

Benefits

The following benefits have been reported by councils through the regional local government organisations which assess and award the Charter.

Benefits: processes and strategies

- Concise and clear guidance on how to achieve the Charter without being too onerous or overly bureaucratic.
- Flexible and focusses positively and supportively on what councils already have in place – a local approach to a national framework.
- Helps councils decide what to prioritise ad improve.
- Councillor development needs are better understood and supported.
- Demonstrates the value placed on councillors carrying out their important and complex role.
- Helps set aside time to reflect and celebrate the good practice already happening.

Benefits: impact on councillors

- The quality of councillor development is improved.
- New councillors are better prepared for their roles and responsibilities.
- Councillor progression is better enabled.
- Helps ensure councillors can operate at their most knowledgeable, skilled and effective.
- Increases councillors' competence and confidence.
- Helps councillors navigate the ever more complex and demanding role and local government landscape.
- Self-care and reflection for councillors through development and growth.

Benefits: impact on all partners

- Strengthens member-officer relationships.
- Helps ensure effective top team political and managerial leadership.
- Encourages robust and accountable decision making.
- Helps ensure proactive succession planning.
- Helps improve councillor diversity.
- Enhances democracy and participation.
- Strengthens relationships with residents and partners.
- Improves outcomes for communities.
- Fosters a culture of learning and support within the council and with partners.

Additional benefits of Charter Plus accreditation

- Highest level of commitment and a holistic approach means the benefits filter more widely.
- Case studies highlight successes and encourage more councillors to participate.
- Evaluation ensures high quality learning and development is delivered to councillors.
- Learning and development for councillors supports council's objectives.
- Councillors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- Successful and impactful Personal Development Plans (PDPs) for councillors.
- Deeper intel of the impact of learning and development.
- Helps prioritise, horizon-scan and deliver the 'next level' of member development.
- Strengthened place-based focus by sharing development opportunities and promoting the role of the councillor to other organisations in the local area.
- Effective succession planning and candidate recruitment activities.
- Evaluation draws out the impacts to the community through feedback from local partners.

Resource commitment

- The framework gives concise and clear guidance on how to achieve the charter without being too onerous or overly bureaucratic.
- A flexible approach that focusses positively and supportively on what councils already have in place – a local approach to a national framework.
- Examples of evidence are clearly detailed in the framework.
- Many councils are already doing this work – the charter is a chance for it to be recognised.

Please contact NILGA
f.douglas@nilga.org
for more information

Guidelines and Evidence

There are three essential criteria to achieving the Charter:

There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support.

The Council has a strategic approach to councillor development.

Learning and development is effective in building councillors' skills and knowledge.

Within each of these, there are a number of elements and requirements to demonstrate that the criteria are being met.

These do not dictate what should be in the strategy, the nature of the content or the delivery mechanisms that should be used. The emphasis is on ensuring that all councillors are appropriately developed and supported so that they can be effective in their roles.

The following lists are intended to indicate the sorts of evidence that can be used to show that the council's approach to councillor development meets the charter criteria. Note that:

- There is no need to show all the evidence listed
- This does not preclude the use of other evidence that may not be listed. The emphasis is on a local approach to a national framework
- Some are likely to be stronger indicators than others
- Some pieces of evidence may be applicable to more than one element of the criteria

As described over the next pages, evidence is wide-ranging and could include anything that demonstrates meeting the requirements, for example:

- Meeting notes
- Feedback from councillors and officers
- Strategy and policy documents
- Details of development events

Requirements and examples of evidence

Criterion 1 There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support

Element 1.1 Political and managerial leadership is committed to the development of councillors		
Requirements for Charter	**Requirements for Charter +**	**Examples of evidence**
• Clear commitment from the top political and managerial leadership • Established Cross-party elected member development group that meets regularly • Clear elected member development strategy/framework which is embedded into practice and regularly reviewed • Named councillor/s and officer/s responsible for councillor development	• Clear, formal commitment from political and managerial leadership to shape/provide development opportunities across local government (including partners, e.g. strategic community planning partners) • There is a clear, finance and officer resourced elected member development framework which is embedded into practice and regularly reviewed. • Strategic approach to forward planning of councillor development	• Signed formal commitment to achieve the charter and charter plus • Plans and processes are in place to support councillor development • Cross party elected member development group showing active involvement of councillors in the learning and development process • Councillors are included in any best practice accreditation process such as Investors in People (IiP) Award questioning process (where applicable) • Elected members feedback confirms the plans, processes and confirmed actions are in place. • Learning and development programme informed by members PDP's and Senior Management Team.

Element 1.2
The council has a designated resource and budget for elected member development which is adequate to meet priority development needs.

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• Appropriate and adequate officer resources are in place to support councillor development • Budget is explicit and clearly defined and monitored	• Councillor development and support staff have their own skills development programme • The officer/s are involved in regional and national learning networks to support continuing professional development (CPD) • The budget is carefully reviewed, set and prioritised at a corporate level with input from the elected member development group.	• Officer/s job descriptions • Named officer/s in information distributed to councillors and staff • Councillors are able to name the officer/s • The officer/s are able to demonstrate their understanding of learning and development in a political context • Cross-party member development group terms of reference and active involvement of councillors in the learning and development process demonstrated • Budget reports • Information that informs councillors of the existence of the budget • Minutes of meetings that shows councillors' involvement in setting and monitoring the budget. • Councillors confirm that the budget is sufficient to meet priority current and future development needs

Element 1.3
The council is committed to ensuring equal access to best practice learning and development for all councillors

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• Statistical analysis of categories or types of adjustments needed to enable full and equal access to development opportunities • Timing of events takes account of cultural and personal circumstances • All councillors have equal access to development opportunities • The development programme includes a range of delivery methods to meet different learning styles • Councillors are regularly updated on councillor development activities • Access provision to existing and /or necessary new learning continues should usual business/service provision be disrupted and/or should learning activities have to be delivered in a new/different way.	• Analysis of equality of access is monitored, reviewed and actioned. • Clear alignment to prevailing Local Government Training Group / NILGA regional & national best practice L&D.	• Statistical evidence of attendance levels • A range of learning and development options to meet individual needs are provided and promoted. The range of options is sufficiently robust to cope with any disruption to usual business/service provision and/or new ways of working. • A range of learning and development activities to meet individual needs are provided and promoted • A range of communication methods e.g. internet / intranet / social media and positive case studies, is used to promote development • Councillors confirm that action is taken to respond to and accommodate diversity of needs • Evidence of flexibility and consideration of the timing of development events demonstrated

Element 1.4
The council actively promotes democratic participation, publicises the role of councillors as community leaders and proactively engages with under-represented groups

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• The council holds events and undertakes activities to encourage people to engage with council	• The council takes action to encourage people to engage with council, particularly from under-represented groups and evaluates the impact and success of the activities • The council builds links with local businesses, community organisations and other active citizen bodies through partnership working.	• local democracy week, promoted programme of activities and events delivered • Youth council • Citizenship links with local schools, colleges and universities • Presentations/events delivered in the community specifically to target under-represented groups • Promotional material is made available on the council websites which includes positive media stories.

Criterion 2 The council has a strategic approach to councillor development

Element 2.1
The council has a councillor development strategy/framework in place

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• The strategy/framework is developed and monitored by the cross-party member development group • Strategy/framework identifies priority development needs and makes stated and clear links with councils corporate/strategic objectives. Risk management processes are also in place to deal with any disruption to usual business/service provision or when business has to be delivered in a new/different way • The strategy/framework is regularly reviewed (at least once every three years) by the cross-party member development group • The strategy/framework includes an induction process that is evaluated after each election	• The cross-party elected member development group leads the evaluation of the strategy/framework and identifies and ensures improvements are addressed • Clear alignment to prevailing Local Government Training Group / NILGA regional & national best practice L&D	• A strategy/framework is in place • Cross-party elected member development group has clear, timebound, output driven, terms of reference • Notes of member development meetings showing monitoring and evaluation of the strategy • Member development group demonstrates their involvement in formulating the strategy/framework • Overview and scrutiny review of the effectiveness of the strategy/framework • EMD Body regularly reviews the strategy/framework and its effective implementation and how it aligns to the corporate/strategic objectives, clearly demonstrating the rationale behind stated priorities

Element 2.2
The council has a structured process for regularly assessing councillors' individual learning and development needs based on focused objectives

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• A structured process exists to identify individual development needs in the form of a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) or Personal Development Plans (PDP) and is working effectively • The council is able to react and quickly adapt to offer new development opportunities/activities when usual business/service provision is disrupted and/or has to be delivered in a new/different way.	• All councillors are offered Personal Development Plans, and more than half of councillors take them up • Council has a process for individual councillor reviews to reflect on strengths and support progression	• Councillor role profiles • Training needs analysis • Personal development plans • Use of the LGA/bespoke Political Skills Framework and/or the 21st Century Councillor • Take up of regional training co-ordinated by NILGA

Element 2.3
The various councillor roles are clearly defined and outline how they contribute to the achievement of community, political and council objectives

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence

• Councillors demonstrate an understanding of the skills and knowledge required in their DEA's and council wide roles
 	
• Councillor role profiles exist and are reviewed for all key roles including the ward councillor
 	
• Councillors are clear about what the council is trying to achieve and the key role they play in this as councillors
	• Role profiles are used to identify and prioritise development needs
	
	• Role profiles are used to support mentoring or the appointment of new committee chairs
	
	• Evidence that councillors are clear about:
	
	  - the role of partner bodies
	  - the role of other stakeholders
	  - their own role on partner bodies
	  - their own role in relation to other stakeholder bodies
		• Systems are in place to identify individual development and support needs
		
		• Learning styles and training needs analysis
		
		• Personal Development Plans link to role and corporate objectives
		
		• Councillors are able to describe how learning and development activities have helped them to carry out their role and contribute to the achievement of the council's objectives

Element 2.4
The council has a structured process for assessing current and future leadership and executive team development needs

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• Structured process to assess current and future leadership development needs • This considers corporate risk management planning when usual business/service provision is disrupted and/or has to be delivered in a new/different way. • Joint member-officer development activities in place to support working effectively together	• Leaders, members and chairs have identified and undertaken development appropriate to their responsible area • Councils make provision for leadership development for elected members including NILGA accredited courses if assessed to be of council / community value	• Process in place to identify leadership requirements • Leadership Development Plans • 360 Degree Leadership Audits or use of leadership diagnostic tools as part of leadership development activities. • Political leadership development programmes e.g. NILGA Leadership Programme and other bespoke internal council programmes put in place • Events that support joint member / officer team development • Joint events with executive and senior management • Succession planning strategies • Community leadership development programmes • The political leadership can describe actions taken to develop political leadership capacity • The political and managerial leadership can give examples of how they work together as a team

Element 2.5
There is a corporate councillor learning and development plan in place

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• The plan links to council's corporate objectives and the development of councillors • The plan includes individuals, committees and political leadership needs	• The plan clearly prioritises learning and development that supports the corporate objectives	• Corporate councillor learning and development plan • The cross-party councillor development group are able to explain how learning and development activities are prioritised

Criterion 3 Learning and development is effective in building skills and knowledge

Element 3.1		
Investment in learning and development is regularly evaluated and improvements implemented		
Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• Evaluation approach is in place to analyse the cost and benefits of councillor development • Evaluation and improvement processes consider corporate risk management when usual business/service provision is disrupted and/or has to be delivered in a new/different way. • Political and managerial leadership display a good understanding of both the costs and benefits of development activities • Councillors can describe why they did certain activities, what they learnt and what difference it has made to them carrying out their various roles • Continuous improvement in the approach to developing councillors is identified and implemented	• Evaluation approach is in place to analyse the impact of councillor development activities • Some form of impact assessment at the corporate and community level exists and is used to evaluate the impact of development (e.g. feedback from partners is actively sought, linked to a defined community-based project or development activities in general). • Case studies of how learning and development has impacted on individual and corporate performance • There are links to an evaluation approach including a quality assurance process • Evaluation outcomes inform change and drive continuous improvement • A quality assurance process is in place	• Evaluation approach is in place and is effective • Analysis of costs and benefits to the council from councillor learning and development • Case studies of how learning and development has impacted on individual and corporate performance • Notes of meetings, focus groups, questionnaires or interviews involving councillors evaluating the impact of their development on overall performance • Political and managerial leadership display a good understanding of both the costs and benefits of development activities • Political and managerial leadership can provide examples and evidence of the impact and benefits of councillor development • Evaluation strategy is in place and is effective • Written reviews of learning and development activities with recommendations for change • Notes of meetings, reports, personal statements providing examples of improvements to learning activities

		• Changes to development programmes and a rationale for the changes made
		• Councillors can describe what has been done to improve the development activities
		• Quality assurance process is in place and is effective

Element 3.2
Learning is shared with other councillors and, where appropriate, with officers and stakeholders to encourage capacity building and a culture of learning across the council and externally

Requirements for Charter	Requirements for Charter +	Examples of evidence
• Knowledge and learning is shared with councillors' peers, officers, other councils and organisations. This should also be the case should usual business/service provision be disrupted and/or has to be delivered in a new/different way • Clear alignment to prevailing Local Government Training Group / NILGA regional & national best practice L&D	• There is an effective process in place for disseminating, sharing and exchanging knowledge and learning	• Examples of reports, briefing sessions, and information exchange systems used to capture and disseminate learning programmes of joint learning exchanges • Councillor formal / informal mentoring arrangements • Shared development activities with members, officers and stakeholders. • Developing councillor champions for topic areas • Councillors can give examples of how they have supported and learned from the development of others

Produced in conjunction with the following organisations