

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COUNCIL

6 MARCH 2013

REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

ACHIEVING THE WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (WLGA) CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 To approve the recommendations of the Democratic Services Committee for this Authority to achieve the WLGA Charter for Member Support & Development at the standard level in 2013 with the intention of making a further submission for Advanced Charter in 2014, (subject to the successful achievement of the standard charter award).

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The support provided by the authority to Elected Members assists in the achievement of all corporate priorities.

3. Background.

3.1 What is the Charter?

- 3.1.1 Elected Members today face increasing challenges. Under the modernisation agenda, there are heightened expectations on them to undertake a diversity of roles ranging from that of community leader to their special responsibilities within the Council. Throughout Wales, authorities are striving to provide the best possible support for their members to enable them to meet these challenges. This takes the form of skill and knowledge development, support facilities, and support services.
- 3.1.2 The Welsh Local Government Association has a long history of working with authorities to help them develop these activities. To provide structure to the national programme of support, the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development was developed collaboratively by the Association, members representing each of the political groups and member support officers from each authority.
- 3.1.3 The Charter aims to provide a broad framework for local planning, self-assessment, action and review together with networking and comparison amongst authorities and the sharing of good and innovative practice. Its wide adoption has raised the overall amount and standard of support given to members in Wales.
- 3.1.4 There are 3 levels of award with each level normally requiring to be achieved before progressing to the next level:
1. (Standard) Charter Award
 2. Advanced Charter Award
 3. The Good Practice and Innovation Award

3.2 The following local authorities hold the Charter and Advanced Charter awards:

(Standard) Charter Level

1. Conwy County Borough Council
2. Denbighshire County Council
3. Gwynedd County Council
4. Bridgend County Borough Council
5. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
6. Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
7. Snowdonia National Park Authority
8. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
9. South Wales Fire and Rescue Service
10. Caerphilly County Borough Council
11. Flintshire County Council
12. Powys County Council
13. Torfaen County Borough Council

Advanced Charter Level

14. Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
15. Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

3.2.1 The Charter is awarded for a period of three years after which an authority is able to relinquish, maintain or improve its charter status. There is no requirement to wait the full 3 year period between achieving the (Standard) Charter Award before progressing to the Advanced Charter Level.

3.3 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 introduced legislative requirements for corporate governance and member support and development. Therefore, in 2012 the Charter criteria were further developed to enhance and enable these legal requirements.

3.4 The assessment for each award has been updated as follows:

3.4.1 The (Standard) **Charter Award** is a self assessment undertaken by the Authority, documented and submitted to the WLGA, who will review the submission and determine whether to make the award. The (Standard) Charter Award is designed to establish that an essential range of support and development arrangements are in place, monitored and recorded.

3.4.2 The **Advanced Charter** is a further self assessment, documented and submitted to the WLGA in the same way as the (Standard) Charter Award submission. It is further underpinned by a peer assessment including a site visit undertaken by officers, and member peers from Wales and England. The Advanced Charter is designed to recognise that the arrangements required for the Charter are working effectively.

3.4.3 **The Good Practice and Innovation Award for Member Support and Development** is a new award which seeks to recognise and share excellent or innovative practice in member support and development. The award aims to recognise activities that have **demonstrably improved** practice in Wales.

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 Bridgend County Borough Council was awarded the WLGA (Standard) Charter Award in 2010. The Authority's charter status is due for renewal, maintenance or improvement during 2013. There are a number of factors which should be considered when determining which option is most appropriate for this Authority to undertake in respect of the WLGA Charter for Member Support and Development.

4.2 Newly elected members

4.2.1 At the Local Government Elections in 2012, 24 new councillors were elected to Bridgend County Borough Council. This increased to a total of 25 after the by-election held in the Bryncoch ward on 31 January 2013. This is a significant number of new members (approximately 46%) who initially may have had a very limited knowledge of the local authority or their role as a councillor.

4.3 Introduction of the Local Government (Wales) 2011 Measure

4.3.1 Since Bridgend's successful achievement of the (Standard) Charter Award the Local Government (Wales) Measure has been introduced which further enhanced the support and development expected to be provided to elected members. This was then reflected in the criteria for the achievement of the WLGA Charter. For example, the Measure requires Personal Development Reviews to be provided to members on request. The Charter requires members to be provided with role descriptions which support the Personal Development Reviews.

4.4 Meeting the Requirements

4.4.1 The full criteria for the achievement of the WLGA Charter for Member Support and Development is at Standard and Advanced level shown at **Appendix 1**. An assessment has been undertaken for each of the main criteria that form the award and have been categorised as follows:

Green		-	Few or minimal changes to established processes
Amber		-	Some changes with an element of significant change to existing processes and activities
Red		-	Significant change to existing processes and activities or the introduction of new processes or activities

4.4.2 The following table shows the initial assessment of the implications of achieving the Charter at Standard and Advanced level.

	Topic	Standard	Status	Advanced	Status
A1	Members are supported with role descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role descriptions need to be updated and adopted Work required in respect of role descriptions for outside bodies 	Amber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role descriptions for all members covering all aspects of their role. Members are undertaking the responsibilities 	Red

	Topic	Standard	Status	Advanced	Status
				described in the role descriptions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role descriptions inform the PDR process 	
A2	Members are supported in undertaking their duties according to high standards of conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members are provided with training and development in the detail of the local code of conduct, taking into account any changes in the model or local codes as they emerge. 	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training is updated and delivered regularly. Potential breaches are addressed internally, as set out in the Ombudsman's report concerning local resolution. There are few justifiable referrals to the Ombudsman because members do not understand the code. 	Green
A3	Members are supported in understanding their roles and responsibilities as set out in the Constitution.	All members have received training on and understand the contents of the constitution.	Amber	The Constitution and related documents listed at level one change in line with requirements.	Amber
B1	A member learning and development strategy has been adopted.	A local member development strategy is in place. The strategy sets out the approach that the authority and the Democratic Services Committee takes to member development. This includes the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Development Reviews • Personal Development Plans • Training needs analysis 	Green	The majority of members undertake PDRs regularly and at least annually according to the requirements set out in the first level. The PDR provides opportunities for members to identify the level at which development is required	Red
B2	Arrangements are in place for <u>all</u> members to be offered a PDR.	Personal support and development reviews which are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • based on role descriptions • contribute to personal development plans • are conducted by senior members or 	Red	The majority of members undertake PDRs regularly and at least annually according to the requirements set out in the first level. The PDR provides opportunities for members to identify	Red

	Topic	Standard	Status	Advanced	Status
		<p>other deemed suitably qualified as set out in the Measure guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are <u>made available</u> for all members and <u>must</u> be undertaken by members in a receipt of a senior/civic salary. 		the level at which development is required.	
B3	A development programme for councillors	An annual development programme informed by the member development strategy is in place	Green	The development programme is updated every year following monitoring and evaluation of the previous year and is demonstrably in line with member needs and the MD strategy.	Amber
B4	Prospective candidates, candidates and new members are informed of their role and responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council uses the national guidance and support materials available for candidates and prospective candidates. All new or returning members are provided with a programme of induction. 	Green	Use is/planned or made of the national questionnaire to inform the development of candidates information for the next elections	Amber
B5	Development activities are relevant and of high quality.	Learning activities are provided in appropriate styles and settings based on the learning needs and styles of individuals and committees.	Green	Training and development is provided to a consistently high standard, commissioning and evaluation is effective and systematic.	Amber
B6	There is a clear responsibility for leading the programme, driving the strategy and monitoring the outcomes.	The Authority has clearly defined the arrangements for developing, implementing and monitoring its strategy for member support and development. Individual members and officers have clear roles in leading and championing this area	Green	These arrangements are mature and effective in representing the views of all members and the needs of the organisation in sponsoring and developing the strategy and monitoring the training programme and outcomes.	Amber
B7	Resources are identified and provided for member development.	Dedicated resources are identified and provided for member development activities.	Green	Resources, whether people or money, are allocated according to the priorities in the	Amber

	Topic	Standard	Status	Advanced	Status
		The authority provides the “reasonable level” of development required by the Measure.		<p>strategy arising from organisational needs or those expressed by members in their PDRs and TNAs.</p> <p>Consideration has been given to sharing resources between authorities and (where a clear benefit exists) collaborative arrangements have been made.</p>	
B8	Members are offered the opportunity to be mentored by member peers.	The authority is exploring the needs of members to be mentored. Any member who has requested a mentor is provided with one. Mentors are trained in mentoring skills.	Green	The authority has a mentoring strategy to support the needs of members who have requested mentors.	Amber
C1	Officer support is provided for member development, support and scrutiny.	<p>Every member committee, panel, forum etc. has officer support provided. Members are also supported in their case work.</p> <p>Overview and scrutiny committees have dedicated support from officers who can provide impartial research, support and advice.</p>	Green	Members are satisfied with the level of support provided.	Amber
C2	Arrangements made for the business of the Council are flexible and enable members to participate fully regardless of personal circumstances	<p>A review of the arrangements for council business has taken place and as a result, meeting times, arrangements and venues reflect the needs of members as closely as possible.</p> <p>Members have been involved in developing the approaches to remote attendance as set out in the standing orders as/when required by the Measure.</p>	<p>Green</p> <p>Amber</p>	<p>Arrangements for remote attendance should be in place.</p> <p><u>Note</u> The criteria for remote attendance should only be applied when the Measure has been enacted.</p>	Red
C3	Contact management and communication	Systems are in place to enable members to liaise with council officers regarding services provided both within and outside the authority. Community groups and individuals are also assisted in contacting local members. Members are able to contact stakeholders.	Green	The systems required for level one are working effectively. Members can effectively access officers regarding service delivery and individuals and communities can access members.	Green

	Topic	Standard	Status	Advanced	Status
C4	Annual reports	The authority makes arrangements for all members to be able to publish annual reports, according to the guidance in the measure.	Green	Members in receipt of a Senior/Civic Salary publish annual reports.	Amber
C5	Personal support for members	Members are provided with access to guidance on their rights and benefits as members.	Green	Members report that this information and advice is adequate.	Amber
D1	All members are provided with adequate access to ICT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members are provided with the equipment, or connectivity required to undertake their role. ▪ Basic training is provided in its use and help desk facilities are available. ▪ Members are supported in remote working through the use of remote access codes and Skype etc. 	Green Amber	Members are routinely using the provisions required for level one and report that this is sufficient.	Amber
D2	Information resources are provided	A central collection of information dedicated to member needs is provided as part of the information and research support available to members.	Green	Members routinely use the provisions required for level one and report that this is sufficient	Amber
D3	Facilities for members to work in the Council are available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member needs have been reviewed and where required the following are provided. • Offices for senior office holders. 	Green	Members report that facilities are sufficient and that their needs are regularly reviewed.	Amber

4.4.3 The following options and implications regarding the WLGA Charter for Member Support & Development have been considered:

4.4.4 Option 1 **Do Nothing and let the Charter Award lapse.** This would be a retrograde step and much of the good work that has taken Bridgend to become a leading authority in many aspects of the support and development provided to members would be unrecognised, have wasted resources and the efforts of elected member and officers and could be perceived as demoralising.

Option 2 **Re-apply for Standard Level Charter Status in 2013 followed by Advanced Level Charter in 2016.** This option would provide the opportunity to make the required changes in the processes and culture in Bridgend to maintain Charter Status. It would allow the new members to be fully involved in all the activities required to achieve the (Standard) Charter Award and provide time to progress all aspects of the requirements for an Advanced Charter submission 3 years later. It should be noted that much of the evidence that is currently available

is unlikely to be appropriate or valid in 2016 for the submission for the Advanced Charter.

- Option 3 **Apply for Advanced Level Charter Status in 2013.** This is a significant step up in the delivery of support and the commitment and workload of elected members and officers. New processes would need to be put in place and embedded in the culture of the Authority. To complete the additional requirements and fully evidence them by the submission date of September 2013 would be a major challenge.
- Option 4 **Re-apply for (Standard) Charter in 2013 with the intention of making a further submission for Advanced Charter in 2014** (subject to the successful achievement of (Standard) Charter Award). This is the preferred option. It provides an opportunity to submit and maintain our current level of (Standard) Charter Award and embed good practices within the newly elected member community. The ultimate aim will be to develop our processes and support beyond that expected for the (Standard) Charter Award during the forthcoming year in readiness for the submission of a successful bid for the Advanced Charter Award in 2014. This option also allows all members to be fully engaged with their personal development and provides a suitable time period to ensure that the enhanced criteria can be achieved and embedded within the Authority.

- 4.4.5 It is anticipated that the Democratic Services Committee will have a significant role to play in the development and monitoring of all aspects of member development and support and particularly in respect of achieving any Charter Award.
- 4.4.6 The Democratic Services Committee recommends that Option 4 (shown above) for approval by Council in respect of the achievement of the WLGA Charter for Member Support and Development.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules

- 5.1 There is no effect on the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no equalities implications in respect of this report.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 All activities described in this report will be met from existing budget provisions.

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 That Council considers the recommendation of the Democratic Services Committee and the information shown in paragraph 4 of the report to determine the most appropriate option for achieving the WLGA Charter for Member Support and Development.

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Background documents – None