



## South West Charter for Elected Member Development

<b>Name of Council:</b>	<b>West Dorset District Council</b>
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### Description

- Charter Commitment – July 2007
- Cross party Member Development Steering Group led the process enabling councillors and officers to work together to develop and embed member development best practice into our mainstream democratic processes and progress member development programmes
- Action plan based on self-assessment developed with the Member Development Steering Group
- Member Development Strategy sets out the council's approach to member development and support
- Working towards the charter has helped to bring together member development and support activities and provided a structure to formalise the council's approach based on good practice
- Key initiatives include:
  - Establishment of an annual cycle of member development planning
  - Improved personal development plan process
  - Allocation within member development budget for individual needs
  - Appointment of Member Development Champion
  - Joint working with other Dorset councils
- Charter awarded – March 2009
- Charter process has helped to identify ongoing improvements to member development and support and the action plan continues to be developed and monitored by the Member Development Steering Group

### Benefits

#### For the Council

- Member development activities are now clearly focussed on the council's corporate priorities and are evaluated to ensure that they are adding value
- Processes put in place give a robust framework for responding to future challenges and legislative changes
- Working towards and achieving charter status has raised the profile of member development in the council. Member development is now firmly on the council's agenda with both members and officers driving it forward
- Charter status supports the council in external challenge e.g. achievement of Equalities Level 3 and challenges such as audit
- Provides a structure for the identification of continuous improvement

### **For the Councillors**

- Member development is owned by members through the Member Development Steering Group who develop and champion the area amongst all members
- With the introduction of personal development plans, members have the opportunity to identify their own learning needs and style – they are able to influence the choice of development opportunities and the way they are delivered
- An allocation within the overall member development budget for each political group means that there is now funding available for individual needs and provides a structure for dealing with requests
- A wide range of learning and development opportunities are available to members including use of web based learning, books, CDs, external courses, one to ones and recognised qualifications
- Comprehensive induction process ensures members feel equipped to deliver across the range of their responsibilities
- Members have an improved understanding of the support available to them
- Opening up sessions to members from other councils and having partners run sessions provide good networking opportunities
- Members are supported to carry out their varied roles and well placed to serve their communities

### **For the Local Community**

- Members have access to the knowledge and support they need to respond to constituent enquiries, giving them greater confidence in dealing with community issues
- Members are able to take more informed decisions
- Resources made available for member development are closely monitored and targeted efficiently
- Increased public awareness about the role of the council and councillors, which in turn will hopefully encourage members of the public to consider standing for election

### **Quotes**

#### **David Clarke, Chief Executive**

“The charter provided a powerful framework for the council’s existing member development programme. We were the fifth authority in the South West to be awarded charter status which usefully provided a target for the ongoing improvement in the support for the council’s members. The programme has raised the corporate and individual capacity required to carry out the full range of activities required of members in today’s local government. It has helped invigorate the confidence of members to fulfil the demanding roles both within the council, their communities and in the council’s partnership activities. In addition the programme has helped to focus the support mechanisms provided by officers. There has been a marked shift in members developing their own scrutiny processes and programmes with the outcome of bringing real rewards to the Council.”

#### **Councillor Robert Gould, Leader of Council**

“With tough times ahead for all councils, it has never been more important to make sure we have in place the necessary training and support to enable our members to be as effective as possible. This applies equally for Executive members, those involved in scrutiny, development control or licensing and for ward work. In recent years we had developed an effective programme of member development but the decision to apply for the South West Members’ Charter was the catalyst to take it to a higher level. The results are reflected in the continued improvement of the performance of our council for the benefit of the people of West Dorset.”

**Councillor Mary Penfold, Member Development Champion**

“As Champion for Member Development I have been closely involved with both the Member Development Steering Group and officers during our work towards the charter. I have seen at first hand that the charter has helped us to build on our work in this area and that member development has brought real benefits to councillors, the council and with our work with other councils as well as organisations and communities in the West Dorset area. However we recognise that achieving the charter is part of our journey of continuous improvement.”

**Councillor Stella Jones, Leader of Liberal Democrat Group / Councillor Ros Kayes, Deputy Leader of Liberal Democrat Group**

“Member Development has improved enormously over the life time of this council. Members can now access a variety of development opportunities and request specific training to support their role in the council and in the community. The Member Development Steering Group enables members and officers to plan a four year programme for the benefit of all.

A clearly structured member development plan is a prerequisite for good governance at any council. The range of officer led training and external expertise is particularly useful in allowing members to develop the independence of thinking and knowledge required to scrutinise council performance and to be aware of the role that all of us share in being accountable for decisions taken to our electorate.”

**Councillor David Barrett, Leader of West Dorset Group**

“Any action that seeks to provide and to improve the knowledge and efficiency of councillors of all parties equally is to be welcomed. Under the auspices of the charter the council has sort to provide information and education to us all and in my opinion have met the requirements. We will now seek to maintain and provide these for the future good of councillors and thus to the welfare and benefit of the council taxpayer”.

Contact information:

If you want to find out more about West Dorset’s approach to the challenges and benefits of the charter, please get in touch with us:

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