



Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council



Draft Re-Assessment Report (Version 1)

February/March 2011

1. Introduction

Rotherham MBC made a formal and public commitment to the continuing development of its elected members, and to the re-achievement of Charter status. They were formally re-assessed and achieved the Charter for Member Development on 8th February 2011.

Local Government Yorkshire and Humber (LGYH) are pleased to announce that Rotherham MBC has been re-assessed against the national standards developed jointly by LG Improvement & Development (formerly the I&DeA) and Regional Employers' Organisations, and is hereby awarded the Charter for Member Development.

The assessment team comprised

- Councillor Abi Bell, Hull City Council
- Mike Leitch, Lead Assessor (Y&H Region)
- Karen Weaver, Workforce & OD Services Manager, LGYH

The charter assessment process for Rotherham MBC involved the following stages:

- Completing a detailed self-assessment of the member development process at Rotherham MBC and compiling a portfolio of evidence
- A pre-assessment site visit by Mike Leitch and Karen Weaver on 2nd November 2010 to meet with the officer responsible for Councillor Development to discuss in detail the self-assessment document, review the portfolio of evidence, and in general the way that member development was structured and delivered by the Council. The purpose of this visit being to check the readiness of the authority for formal re-assessment.
- A full day formal assessment visit on 8th February 2011 during which the assessment team held 1:1 meetings with Deputy Leader (and Chair of the Member Training & Development Panel) and a cross-section of elected members. In addition, the team interviewed the Parish Council representative on the Member Training & Development Panel.
- Telephone interviews with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Opposition (9th February 2011) and Leader of the Council (10th February 2011).

This report represents the team's findings, based on the interviews that took place and documentary information made available before, during and following the site visits. The commitment to achieving the Member Development Charter is entirely voluntary and the judgements are those made by peers against the Charter criteria.

Finally, the assessment team would like to thank **Cath Saltis** (Head of Scrutiny & Member Services) for her hard work and support before and during the assessment visits, and everyone we interviewed during the assessment process for their openness, hospitality and their continued support of the Charter initiative.

2. Executive Summary

Rotherham MBC has a **Member Development Strategy** which identifies priorities in line with corporate values and which seeks to ensure that members are engaged and provided with the opportunity to develop and refresh their skills on a continuous basis. An annual programme describes the ways that development interventions will be organised and delivered, which reflects the individual and corporate development needs identified through Personal Development Reviews and other processes. At the time of writing, this strategy was being reviewed.

A cross-party **Member Training & Development Panel (MTDP)** ensures that members themselves are engaged in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of development activity of their peers. Members of that group also act as member development champions, and play a key role in the development and subsequent review of the Member Development Strategy and delivery programme. The MTDP is chaired by the **Deputy Leader**, who has cabinet responsibility for member development. Minutes of the meetings of the MTDP are received by the Cabinet.

At officer level, the **Head of Scrutiny & Member Support** has overall corporate responsibility for member development and ensures that this activity is an integral part of the corporate improvement plan and aligned to the Council's Development Strategy and overall Plan. Day-to-day co-ordination of member development and administrative activities is undertaken by officers from the **Member Support Team**, working closely with, and supported by their line manager the **Head of Scrutiny and Member Support**.

The Leader, Chief Executive and an overwhelming majority of elected members strongly support the continuous improvement of councillors and recognise the value of a 'member-led' strategy and a the offer of a flexible, comprehensive programme of councillor development activity. Positive indicators included

- The Leader and Chief Executive conveyed the view that Members had become "more confident, knowledgeable and skilled" as a result of the development activities they had undertaken. This had impacted on the overall performance improvement of the Council
- A keen, enthusiastic Member Training and Development Panel which is proactively led by the deputy leader.
- Positive feedback regarding the scope and quality of development opportunities
- A willingness to constantly review and subsequently improve the development options and opportunities available to members

The assessment team were impressed by the enthusiasm and the extremely positive comments expressed by councillors about their development, and equally by the comments of senior officers who alluded to the impact such training had made on individual and corporate performance.

That said, attention is drawn to the following areas where further improvement could be made. These are set out in some detail later in the report together with a set of recommendations. It is accepted that some or all of these might be addressed within the review of the member development framework. Areas for improvement are summarised as:

- Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that councillors from the authority engage in and share learning through development activity with peers from other councils in the South Yorkshire sub-region, this is an area that can be developed further. Similarly, more could be done in regard to improving organisational learning by developing existing systems to capture the learning outcomes from/ and measure the impact of those activities.
- The evaluation process used for member development, tends to concentrate on feedback relating mainly to quality of delivery. Although quality is important, more needs to be done to link delivery to impact and how to measure individual improvement and community benefit.
- The Council offers a range of Buddying/Mentoring opportunities to new councillors (mainly within political groups) – feedback suggests that style, approach and quality is inconsistent and a little ad-hoc.

These points are covered in more detail within the body of the comprehensive feedback report which follows.

Mike Leitch
Lead Assessor (Yorkshire & Humber Region)

Cllr Abi Bell
Hull City Council

Karen Weaver, Workforce & OD Services Manager
Local Government Yorkshire & Humber

3. COMPREHENSIVE FEEDBACK REPORT

The following comments aim to provide a comprehensive report of the assessment team's findings, as well as providing recommendations to inform the authority's future plans in relation to member development. Comments and recommendations for improvement are made following a series of 'face-to-face' interviews with officers and elected members, supplemented by a review of documentary evidence. Feedback is set out against a four key stage format relating to accepted member development 'good practice' which covers:

- Planning and Policy
- Implementation and Delivery
- Monitoring and Review
- Evaluation

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for further improvement.

Stage One – Planning and Policy

The local authority plans and invests in member development to support continuous improvement and to deliver organisational objectives

Rotherham MBC has a well developed strategic approach to Member Development, linked to the Council's overall aims and objectives within the Council's Corporate Plan, the Local Area Agreement and other documents. It has clear vision about what it is trying to achieve through member development.

The Cabinet, as the Executive, is responsible for providing leadership and therefore sets strategic objectives for member development and monitors progress against those objectives. The Deputy Leader is responsible at a strategic and operational level for the development of elected members. He is responsible for the identification and implementation of development opportunities. He provides a channel for members to express their views and wishes, and has particular responsibilities for identifying and allocating internal and external conference & seminar opportunities. He updates the Cabinet and the Leader on progress and activity in member development.

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Support is the senior officer responsible for implementing member development arrangements, which are linked in to the Council's Corporate Plan. She liaises with the Chief Executive, SLT and Cabinet as and when necessary on strategic issues to do with member development.

As part of its constitutional arrangements, the Council has a well established Member Training and Development Panel (MTDP), which is chaired by the Deputy Leader of Council. The Panel has played a central role since its inception in both setting the strategic direction for member development and ensuring continuous improvement across all our development activities. Membership is cross-party, and includes representatives from all 'recognised' political groups, audit, scrutiny, regulation board and parish councils. Several members of the MTDP are also Cabinet members.

The MTDP meets monthly with Agendas being determined jointly by the Deputy Leader and Head of Scrutiny and Member Services.

The Chief Executive demonstrates his committed to member development in a number of ways:

- By ensuring that the function is adequately resourced, both in terms of a realistic budget that allows the council to deliver an effective programme of development activity and dedicated officer support. During interview, he described support for member development as 'invest to save'
- Through personal involvement and influence - citing his ongoing work with SLT colleagues to ensure that member development is continually seen as a priority for the Council and mainstreamed throughout the organisation. He was also keen to ensure that officers clearly understood the political context in which they worked, as well as working to build and maintain mutual trust and respect between officers and members.

The authority has clearly recognised the importance of investment in member development, and there was evidence to suggest that sufficient funding had been made available to support both individual and corporate development opportunities. The budget for 2010/11 currently stands at £30K (Directorates make additional funds available to cover development of Portfolio holders). Allocation of the budget is linked to the Council's corporate objectives as well as the organisational and individual needs identified by members and officers. There are regular budget meetings between the Head of Scrutiny and the Chair of the MTDP.

With increasing pressure on all council budgets, the authority were keen to save money by developing additional internal capacity, and they had also worked (in the more recent past) with other local authorities in the South Yorkshire sub-region to ensure that any funding streams for member development were accessed, as well as encouraging members to take advantage of development activities outside the authority ie offered by other local authorities and partner organisations.

Although other officers were involved in supporting member development, these activities were not explicit within their job description. It was the Head of Scrutiny herself, who councillors referred to as their first point of contact regarding member development.

Stage Two – Implementation and Delivery

The local authority delivers effective and timely interventions to achieve its member development priorities whilst promoting and supporting local democracy and community leadership

Evidence suggests that member development is commissioned, delivered and evaluated in line with a strategy that has been developed in consultation with the MTDP. This framework includes a delivery programme that incorporates

- Induction
- Identification of development needs (PDP/PDR processes etc)
- Development Activity
- Promoting and Supporting Local Democracy

Induction

Councillors are elected to Rotherham MBC in ‘thirds’ – the next being in May 2011. In addition to continuity, this means that the council’s induction programme is ‘tested out’ on a regular basis.

The Council provides information to potential candidates about what is involved in being an elected member, and the challenging demands that are placed on them via its Internet site throughout the year, and as part of the nomination packs to candidates and agents at the time of the local elections. Rotherham has also participated in the ‘How to be Councillor Campaign’. The main political parties have an ‘open door’ policy that enables prospective candidates to attend group meetings ahead of the elections to get a ‘political feel’. Prospective candidates will also be contacted by letter providing them with advance notice of the induction programme and associated procedures following successful election. This Information will also be provided on the Council’s website.

Taking place over a two week period the induction programme includes sessions of 2-3 hour duration held at different times of the day (with some repeated in the evening).

The **first week** tends to concentrate on providing newly elected councillors with an opportunity to receive and discuss information about:

- Support (from Member Services)
- Allowances and other financial matters
- Member Development
- IT
- Code of Conduct
- How the Council Works
- Councillor Roles (In the ward and in the Town Hall)
- Surgery safety & Casework

The programme for week one also includes a bus tour of the Borough looking at regeneration projects, customer care centre and landmarks.

Week two tends to focus in more detail on specific roles and responsibilities with introductory sessions on:

- Corporate Parenting
- Licensing
- Planning
- Scrutiny
- IT Skills – Managing Your In Box
- Personal Development Planning

Sessions are led by senior officers of the council and where appropriate, senior councillors. They are also open to attendance by existing councillors who may wish to ‘refresh’ their knowledge.

New members are mentored by their more experienced peers at ward and party level, although comments offered by some councillors elected in May 2010 suggested that they had, and continued to have positive support, others indicated that the quality and effectiveness of such support lacked consistency.

Feedback from councillors elected in May 2010 indicated a high satisfaction with their induction experience, During the past months, the MTDP supported by the Head of Scrutiny and other officers have been reviewing and developing the induction programme, and producing an induction strategy for elections in May 2011. During that process, they have considered good practice examples from other local authorities, as well as existing practice

It is customary for the authority to undertake a six-month review with new councillors to provide them with an opportunity to feed back on their induction experience, development progress and any ongoing support requirements.

Identification of Development Needs

Evidence suggests that Rotherham MBC has a structured process for regularly assessing elected member development needs at an individual and organisational level, which contribute to the formation of the member's development plans. Needs are identified through several processes of, which include:-

a. Organisational need

- Consultations with the elements of the political management framework (members from Cabinet, Scrutiny Commissions, Audit and Regulatory Boards) about the training/development they need and what the outcomes from these activities should achieve.
- Discussions at the MTDP where the implications for member development of national, regional and local initiatives were considered.
- Evaluation of training/development programmes including the induction programme, internal training programmes, information briefs, conferences & seminars plus regional/ national and external events.
- Individual Directorates liaising with the Head of Scrutiny to identify members needs in relation to their services.
- Issues identified by SLT and the chair of the MTDP.

b. Individual development needs

- Individual Personal Development Reviews and Personal Development Plans
- Members directly contacting the Head of Scrutiny and/or the Deputy Leader
- Newly elected members identifying individual development needs during attendance on their induction programme.
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The Head of Scrutiny collates the organisational and individual member needs (as above) and undertakes a training needs analysis, to inform the member's development and training plans.

These proposals will then go for consideration at the MTDP, who will discuss and agree the draft delivery programmes constructed in response to the identified organisational needs.

All member learning and development activities are evaluated to ensure that the member development programme meets all its objectives, the learning needs that were identified, to ensure that there has been a positive impact on the Council's performance and that value for money was achieved. All evaluations are then fed back into the MTDP. To ensure that learning needs have been met, attendance at all events organised (internal and external) is recorded and evaluated using end-of courses evaluation sheets.

All members are offered PDP meetings - to identify individual needs, to evaluate any training events/activities they have attended and to identify the impact on their performance. These Personal Development Plans are developed in relation to their relevant job role descriptions and the council's corporate plan.

PDP interviews follow a fairly standard, well proven format where discussions provide an opportunity for members to reflect on their achievements during the previous 24 months, as well as identifying present and future challenges together with a two way discussion about development options.

Feedback indicated that the majority of councillors who had taken the opportunity to be involved in the PDP process had found it useful, not only in terms of identifying development and support needs, but also preferences relating to delivery methodology. The 1:1 interviews were also seen as a useful opportunity to capture other more wider based member concerns which could not be addressed elsewhere.

Development Activity

There was clear evidence to suggest that the council 'development offer' to members was 'inclusive' and included a range of delivery methods that met their different learning styles and preferences. Rotherham's member development activities are configured so that a wide range of councillors can benefit from them, so that they have the capacity to more effectively carry out their different roles.

The Council has agreed well defined role descriptions for members, which specify personal qualities and skill sets they are expected to have in order to carry-out their roles. The current role descriptions cover the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member, Scrutiny Commission Chair, Regulatory Board Chair, Scrutiny Commission Member and Ward/Local Member.

Through the Head of Scrutiny and Member Support, the Council has been able to bring together the different strands of member development – Training, Information Briefs, and Conferences & Seminars. They are now organised in an integrated way, to ensure that they are getting the maximum impact from them and that they are clearly linked to members' development needs and roles on the Council.

Rotherham has introduced arrangements whereby members have to show how attendance at externally organised conferences & seminars would help them to better understand and carry out their different roles on the Council and would benefit the authority as a whole, they are also required to complete a feedback sheet on their return. Members are also required to share their knowledge and expertise with their colleagues in order to support and develop each other. The main way that they do this through a well developed network of mentoring arrangements, organised via the different political groups.

Developing the general leadership skills of members also remains a key priority, and Members have attended the IDeA Leadership Academy as well as receiving regular bulletins on leadership development. Leadership and Cabinet members have regular senior management meetings for their respective portfolios, as well as meetings with the Leader and Chief Executive.

Rotherham has also increased member capacity by organising training and other in-house events aimed at improving group capacity for the different parts of the political management arrangements. The way in which this group capacity building takes place is summarised below.

Cabinet - regular private meetings take place which provide the opportunity to discuss and reflect the operation of the decision making process. Joint sessions have been held with SLT.

Scrutiny Commissions - joint training has taken place with other organisations, especially on health matters. Development of the scrutiny process / member development issues a regular area for discussion / direction at the Chairs & Vice Chairs meetings. Co-opted members are included/invited to attend relevant development sessions.

Licensing Regulatory Board - bespoke training events have been held to explain member roles in the licensing process, e.g. making personal opinions/comments at a hearing (in front of the applicant etc); and the conduct of the hearing – what is and is not appropriate behaviour by members.

Planning Regulatory Board – specialised training events have been held to explain member roles in the planning process. The most recent of which took place at the start of the municipal year. The work of the Planning Regulatory Board is also covered as part of the new member induction programme.

Audit Committee - most of the training for the Audit Committee is provided in house, in the form of training sessions held before committee meetings. Audit Committee members have also attended bespoke external training sessions

Standards Committee - similarly, most of the training for the Standards Committee is provided in- house. Where appropriate, Parish Councils are invited to attend.

Learning opportunities and activities are part of a core annual training and development programme based on Personal Development Reviews and refreshers in addition to identified organisational and statutory training requirements. Examples include:

- Presentations
- Facilitated discussion
- Pre-Council Briefings/regular updates
- National Leadership Programmes
- Mentoring (internal and external)
- 1:1 IT support
- Skills workshops
- E-learning opportunities
- Shadowing (internal and external to the authority)

Members confirmed that they received timely and regular information regarding development opportunities available to them. Details were presented in advance in a seasonal programme, and reminders circulated via emails, and in hard copy. Information was also circulated to Group offices. Care was taken not to schedule activities on dates that clashed with other corporate events/religious celebrations etc. Where required, additional briefings were organised and details circulated to members.

Feedback, suggested a high level of satisfaction with the quality and scope of development activity provided by the Council. All elected members were offered development opportunities that included access to staff development programmes (where appropriate), bespoke workshops, external programmes, and activities provided within political groups. 1:1 IT support was also available to members. Places on relevant development activities were offered to Parish and Town Council members, co-opted members of scrutiny commissions etc. and where required, special needs were catered for. Feedback also suggested that councillors welcomed the opportunity to undertake joint training with their peers from other authorities and partner organisations as well as a wider use of members in delivering sessions.

Predictably, it was also noted that more often than not, member's comments seemed to relate to courses and not other wider development opportunities such as meetings, peer mentoring, etc. Although this is not a major area of concern, it does raise the question that if members do not see the opportunity to learn from non-course based activity as learning, then they may not seek to engage in them to address a development need. It is also the case, that the learning from such activities is very rarely captured or recorded.

The Council actively encourages and provides opportunity for members to participate in joint development with a wide range of external partners and other local authorities. Each year places are offered on the Leadership Academy. Members representing the authority on external bodies were also encouraged to take advantage of any relevant and suitable development opportunities on offer. Despite this provision, there is scope to develop (and offer) more activities that would provide an opportunity for councillors, officers and members of the public to learn together.

There appeared to be clarity regarding member and officer responsibility relating to member development and support, and members appeared pleased with the level of officer support they received.

Promoting and Supporting Local Democracy

The Council has continued to demonstrate commitment to reducing barriers to participation in the democratic process, and especially to mitigating work-life balance difficulties. As part of the Member Development Framework, it has:

- Provided all members with 'home working' so that they can access the Council's ICT systems remotely and at times which suit them and around their care, family and work responsibilities. This has reduced the number of times that members have to travel in to the Town Hall in order to carry out their different roles.
- Reconfigured the start time of meetings so that they fit in with the caring responsibilities that many councillors have for children, either as parents or grandparents. Where practical, meetings of the different parts of the constitutional arrangements take place at different times of the day so that more members have the opportunity to attend them, especially those in full-time employment.
- Through the PDR process provide opportunities for members to identify caring responsibilities / difficulties and for the Council to make the necessary adjustments to their work and learning styles;
- Put in place a state of the art hearing loop system in the main council meeting rooms for people with hearing problems;
- Put in place new audio visual equipment more suitable for people with sight problems.
- Reduced the length of reports and simplified, where possible, the language and format used so that they are more accessible for people with literacy problems (supporting this 'pre meeting' now take place before many meetings in order to help explain the contents of reports etc.)
- Established as part of the Council's Members Allowances scheme a simplified procedure to claim 'Carers Allowance
- Provided alternative forms of member development opportunities to enable members to take advantage them remotely (e.g. e-learning);
- Set the diary of meetings with the aim of being aware and if possible avoiding religious or culturally sensitive dates for all Rotherham's communities, including those from the BME backgrounds.
- Made available electronically, via the Members Intranet, information about Members Allowances (including the Carers Allowance) and the support that is available to help them carry out their roles.

The Council is keen to encourage participation and engagement with its constitutional arrangements and work of the council and councillors, and has also done much to raise the profile of the different components of the constitutional arrangements; especially those parts of it which provide a conduit for the public to get involved. As part of this,

people are encouraged to participate in scrutiny commission investigations by providing their views and opinions as part of the evidence gathering process. We have done this in innovative ways; for example, the recent investigation into waste and street cleansing was publicised through a series of adverts on a local radio station.

Citizenship forms part of the curriculum at all council schools and is promoted through the network of schools councils' for pupils and the Youth Council, which is directly elected by young people in Rotherham and supported by the Authority's staff. Working with a local voluntary organisation, senior elected members have been involved in face-to-face and online sessions to explain to young people about the purpose of local government and local elected members. These events have formed part of 'Rotherham Week' which usually take place during the autumn.

All electoral registration information is made available in minority ethnic languages. The Elections Service promotes electoral registration and participation in the democratic process. Electoral services also attend Citizenship Ceremonies in order to provide new citizens information about the democratic process and what they need to do to register to vote.

Stage Three – Monitoring and Review

The local authority monitors and reviews the ongoing effectiveness of its member development activity

There is evidence to suggest that Rotherham undertakes regular reviews of the Member Development Strategy, overall training and budgetary provision. Information from the PDP process goes to inform actions taken and considerations made by the MTDP to improve the 'offer' to members. The Executive were kept up to date on member development by the Chair of the MTDP. Political Groups were kept informed and encouraged to comment via their respective members on the MTDP.

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Support holds regular meetings with the Deputy Leader to assess the effectiveness of member development activities. Topics covered at those meetings include: (a) budget monitoring information on the overall use of resources, (b) major spending decisions (e.g. on member attendance at external conferences & seminars) and (c) the impact of specific member development activities. She also attends training sessions delivered by officers and external trainers to ensure that delivery met accepted standards. The results of programme evaluations were fed back to the MTDP so that they can evaluate the impact of member development on Council performance and achievement of objectives.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the authority might also wish to consider other ways to review the activities of those officers /elected members involved in the member development process such as:

- 'benchmarking' against the MTDPs of other authorities who have either achieved or are working towards Charter status. Meeting other member bodies with similar remits would provide an opportunity to compare and contrast practice and process. This is also a useful way of discovering innovative ways to promote and deliver member development and measure the impact of member development activity on both the council and community.

- Commissioning a scrutiny review of member development – an activity used by other authorities to ‘test out’ member development processes and practice where it is felt that a review conducted by other members (not involved in member development) might be easier to accept than one undertaken by officers.

It is stressed that these are measures that the authority might wish to consider in the future, and the award of Charter status is not dependent on the completion of such activities.

Stage Four - Evaluation

The local authority adopts a robust approach to evaluate the effectiveness of its member development investment, which is fully deployed across all areas of activity and investment

In Rotherham, all member learning and development activities have clearly defined learning objectives, and are evaluated to ensure that the member development programme met all its objectives, the learning needs that were identified and to also ensure that there has been a positive impact on the Council’s performance and that value for money was achieved. This is usually undertaken by the use of post activity evaluation sheets. A summary of evaluations are then fed back into the MTDP. To ensure that learning needs have been met, attendance at all events organised (internal and external) is recorded.

Those members attending external programmes are required to describe how such programmes will benefit them in their current roles, and then to reflect on what they have learnt from attending development activities.

All member learning and development activities are evaluated to ensure that the member development programme meets all its objectives, the learning needs that were identified, a to ensure that there has been a positive impact on the Council’s performance and that value for money was achieved. All evaluations are then fed back into the MTDP. To ensure that learning needs have been met, attendance at all events organised (internal and external) is recorded and evaluated using end-of courses evaluation sheets.

The induction programme is evaluated in late August/ September and the results reported to the MTDP for discussion so that further improvements can be made to the following years programme.

4. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

As previously mentioned in this report, Rotherham MBC has achieved the required standard to be re-awarded Charter status. The following comments and recommendations are offered in that context and to provide a degree of future focus for those councillors and officers involved in and/or with responsibility for member development.

4.1 Planning and Policy

There was clear evidence to support the view that the MLDP was representative in its membership, effective in the way it conducted its business, and confirmed the view that member development is 'member led.' The involvement of Parish Councils, Regulatory Boards and Chairs of Scrutiny in that forum ensured a 'wider focus' on development activities. That said, a number of issues needed to be explored in order to prepare them for the future.

To the external observer, membership of the MLDP might appear to be too large – raising the possibility of procrastination, and difficulty in reaching decisions quickly. However, the system seems to work for the authority, and the involvement of so many members with such diverse roles does bring many benefits to the process.

Successful assessment against the Charter standard will inevitably lead to greater expectations, and comparison with other authorities. It was therefore important for the MTDP to 'raise their game' and profile, and operate in an even more strategic way.

Each local authority is different in their approach to member development and many have developed programmes and systems that Rotherham might wish to think about exploring. Learning from and with other local authorities who have already gained or who are aspiring to gain Charter/Charter Plus status would bring opportunities to learn new approaches.

LGYH are ideally placed to facilitate and support such exchanges of ideas and good practice.

Recommendation 1

That the MTDP establishes contact with, and 'benchmarks' against other local authorities who have achieved or seeking to achieve Charter/Charter plus status

4.2 Implementation and Delivery

Whilst there is clearly a very positive view of the quality and quantity of training being provided by Rotherham MBC, many members and officers referred mainly to 'training courses' rather than a broader range of development. Trying to 'capture' the learning from meetings, and 'on the job' learning can be extremely difficult' but could be something that is referred to during PDR interviews, as could the expansion of self-assessment (pre and post activity) to all development programmes.

The introduction of role profiles to PDRs will help, but the authority might wish to incorporate a strategy to engage those councillors who cannot or will not take advantage of the PDR 'offer' and that identified the reasons behind this. The feedback from such an exercise would inform future decisions around delivery.

To widen the identification of development needs process, the authority might wish to consider some form of annual councillor training and development survey (questionnaire), to supplement the information gained via PDRs.

Recommendation 2

That the PDD/PDR and other processes be adapted to include:

- ***some form of reflection on what and how members learn in other (less structured) situations***
- ***clearer information that explained why the interviews were important, the benefits etc (to stimulate wider engagement)***

Members are actively encouraged to take on external roles, representing the Council on sub-regional and regional bodies. This was viewed as a way of developing skills and knowledge whilst also raising the profile of the authority. Councillors are also provided with the opportunity to learn with and from their peers on external programmes. Although some groups insist on feedback as a condition of attendance at conferences etc, there was little evidence as to how learning from those activities is shared or transferred within the authority, nor recorded (in order to avoid duplication). There appeared to be a lack of consistency regarding:

- How councillors feed back from external events
- How councillors share the learning from sitting on external bodies
- How councillors with formal roles on the LSP/other partnerships feed back
- How that learning is recorded

Recommendation 3

That the authority adopts some formal mechanism which requires feedback to an appropriate audience, and which identify appropriate recording methodology

While the proposed induction programme and plans for the 'all-out' election in May 2011 appear to be comprehensive, similar care and support should be provided to councillors elected at by-elections albeit in a scaled down format.

Recommendation 4

That the authority consider how best to provide suitable support to councillors elected at By-Elections, and develop a suitable induction programme for such situations

The current practice of providing 'buddies' to newly elected councillors is to be applauded, however the Council could make this more effective if they considered ways to address issues relating to 'matching' and consistency.

Recommendation 5

That consideration be given to the effectiveness of the current 'buddying' system, and ways to improve it (in preparation for the May 2011 elections).

4.3 Monitoring and Review

Evidence suggests that there are sufficient and efficient arrangements in place to monitor and review member development.

4.4 Evaluation

There is clear evidence that the authority seeks to measure the impact of its investment in member development activities i.e. monitoring of attendance levels, completion of evaluation forms and induction evaluation questionnaires etc. However, the evidence presented, suggests that this approach is primarily concerned with measuring the quality of delivery provision as opposed to impact on individual performance or on the community.

Recommendation 6

That the authority consider the development of a more robust and comprehensive outcome focused approach to member development, building evaluation in to every stage of the member development infrastructure as well as delivery activity. This should enable the authority to be clear about outcomes/impact it is seeking to achieve from their investment.

To achieve this, the authority may wish to consider the following:

- Producing a clear policy statement within the member development framework/strategy documentation that described in detail how evaluation would assist the council in measuring the impact of its investment in member development.
- Having explicit clear roles and responsibilities regarding those bodies and individuals involved in the evaluation process
- Introducing questions in the documentation used for post-activity feedback that encouraged members to rate their performance (using an appropriate scale) pre and post activity, and how undertaking the activity had impacted on their community (ies)
- Engaging in some form of comparative 'benchmarking' activity with other similar sized authorities which might produce data/good practice approaches to evaluation.
- Exploring evaluation 'models' from other sectors

This approach could also improve the quality and consistency of the information being fed into the MTDP, to enable that body to monitor progress against the overall training programme, to inform decision making about emerging priorities, and future plans. Subsequently this could also enable the MTDP to carry out an annual value for money assessment.

**First Draft Report prepared by Mike Leitch
on behalf of the LGYH Charter Assessment Team**