


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Standards Advisory Committee</p> <p>Thursday, 16 January 2025</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Shupriya Iqbal, Director of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Classification: Open (Unrestricted)</p>
<p>Achieving the LGA Member Learning and Development Charter Mark - progress update</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Matthew Mannion, (Head of Democratic Services)
Wards affected	(All Wards);

Executive Summary

This report updates the Standards Advisory Committee on progress towards the Council's intention achieve the Local Government Association (LGA) Charter Mark for Member Learning and Development.

The Committee are asked to review and comment on the report as required.

This report follows on from the yearly Learning and Development update report also on the agenda for this meeting.

Recommendations:

The Standards Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. To review and comment on the report.
2. Endorse the proposal to move forward to formal assessment for the LGA Charter Mark.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Member Learning and Development provides vital support to all Members in their various roles on the Council. It is particularly valuable for those in key decision-making positions.
- 1.2 The Standards Advisory Committee receive yearly update reports on the Learning and Development Programme and previously received a report on the Council's intention to achieve the LGA Charter Mark. This report provides an update to that work and asks Members to endorse the proposal to now seek formal assessment for the Charter Mark.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

2.1 The Council could decide not to adopt the LGA Charter Mark for Learning and Development. This would not have a direct impact but would mean the Council lost a key opportunity for external endorsement of its training programme which is seen as especially important at this time given the level of scrutiny of the Council’s decision-making arrangements and the role of Members.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

3.1 As set out in a report to the Committee on 7 December 2023, the Council is working towards achieving the LGA Member Learning and Development Charter Mark accreditation (the Committee endorsed the project at that meeting).

3.2 Key benefits of achieving the Charter Mark (as stated by the LGA) include:

- Councillor development needs are better understood and supported.
- Demonstrates the value placed on councillors carrying out important, demanding and complex roles.
- Councillors are more knowledgeable, skilled and effective.
- Strengthens relationships with officers, residents and partners.

3.3 Support and evaluation services are carried out by South-East Employers on behalf of the LGA and the cost is £3,750 for each three-year evaluation.

3.4 Officers, with the support of the Member Learning and Development Steering Group, have been working over the past year to meet the requirements of the Charter Mark and this report provides an update.

3.5 The following table sets out the criteria for success that the LGA are looking for along with the evidence the Council intends to provide. Following the table there will be a more detailed description of some of the key activities that have been taking place that are outside of the information provided in the annual member development report (also on the Committee’s agenda).

Criteria 1: There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support			
	Element	Requirements	Evidence
1.1	Political and managerial leadership is committed to the development of councillors	<p>Clear commitment from top political and managerial leadership</p> <p>Cross party working group</p> <p>Councillor development strategy</p>	<p>Signed commitment to achieving the charter (signed by Mayor and CE)</p> <p>Cllrs will be interviewed by assessors</p> <p>Cross party working group agendas and minutes</p>

		Named Councillors and officers responsible for councillor development	Staff JDs with Member Development roles
1.2	The council actively encourages citizenship and publicises the role of councillors as community leaders as part of promoting local democracy so as to encourage underrepresented groups to become a councillor	The council holds a range of activities and events to encourage people to become councillors	Young Mayor Democracy activities with schools Be A Councillor events
1.3	The Council is committed to ensuring equal access to learning and development for all councillors	Analysis of cultural and personal circumstances Timing of training takes account of cultural and personal circumstances All councillors have access to councillor development Development Programme has range of delivery methods Councillors regularly receive updates on activities	Survey results Training takes place twice at different times Individual Member Development Budgets for all Councillors Members Hub documents as well as in person training Member Bulletin Reports to steering group and SAC
1.4	The Council has a designated budget for councillor development which is adequate to meet priority development needs	Budget is explicit and clearly identified and monitored	Budget increased to £60k Set budget line under Member cost code Reports to steering group
1.5	Designated officers of the council have responsibility for co-ordinating councillor development	Appropriate and adequate officer resources are in place to support councillor development	Dedicated Councillor Support Team - JDs include member support work Direct line to MO and Director of Legal through HoDS

Criteria 2: The Council has a strategic approach to councillor development			
2.1	The Council has a councillor development strategy in place	<p>The strategy is developed and monitored by the cross-party member development task group</p> <p>Strategy identifies priority development needs and makes stated clear links with council's corporate/strategic objectives</p> <p>The strategy is regularly reviewed (at least once every three years).</p> <p>The strategy includes an induction process that is evaluated after each election.</p>	<p>Member Development Strategy (note – put in place in 2024 so not yet reviewed)</p> <p>2022 Member Induction Programme and Evaluation</p>
2.2	The Council has a structured process for regularly assessing councillors' individual learning and development needs based on focused objectives	PDPs or Training Needs Analysis	<p>PDPs and PDP summary report</p> <p>Scrutiny Skills Audit /Development work</p>
2.3	The various councillor roles are clearly defined and outline how they contribute to the achievement of community, political and council objectives	<p>Councillors demonstrate an understanding of the skills and knowledge required in their ward and council wide roles</p> <p>Councillor role descriptions exist and are maintained for all key roles including ward councillor</p> <p>Councillors are clear about what the council is trying to achieve and the key role they play in this as councillors</p>	<p>Role profiles on the website</p> <p>Interviews with Councillors</p> <p>PDPs</p>
2.4	The Council has a structured process for assessing current and future leadership and executive team development needs	<p>Structured process in place</p> <p>Development plan in place to support top</p>	PDPs which identify development needs around leadership

		<p>political and management teams in working together</p> <p>Leadership development is used to support succession planning</p>	<p>Scrutiny skills audit to support Scrutiny Chairs/Leads</p> <p>MAB/CMT away days</p> <p>Interviews with key senior members and officers</p>
2.5	There is a corporate councillor learning and development plan in place	<p>Councillor learning and development plan links to council's corporate objectives and the development of councillors</p> <p>Learning and Development Plan includes individuals, committees and political leadership needs</p>	<p>Member Development Strategy</p> <p>Yearly Member Development Plans</p> <p>Individual Member Development Budgets</p> <p>Member Training Brochure</p>
Criteria 3: Learning and Development is effective in building capacity			
3.1	Investment in learning and development is regularly evaluated in terms of the cost benefit and impact	<p>Evaluation strategy is in place</p> <p>Political and managerial leadership display a good understanding of costs and benefits of development</p> <p>Councillors can describe why they did certain activities and the benefits</p>	<p>Councillor / officer interviews</p> <p>Training evaluation forms process</p> <p>Reports to steering group</p>
3.2	Learning is shared with other councillors and where appropriate with officers and stakeholders to encourage capacity building and learning culture	<p>Knowledge and learning and shared with councillors' peers, officers and others</p>	<p>Information on Member Briefings</p> <p>Members Hub</p> <p>Engagement with London Member Development Forum</p> <p>Councillor interviews</p>

3.3	The council demonstrates a commitment to an effective councillor learning and development programme by implementing improvements to learning and development activities as they are identified	Continuous improvement in the approach to developing councillors	<p>Increase in overall member development budget</p> <p>Engagement with London Member Development Forum</p> <p>Creation of Individual member development budgets</p>
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Key Activities linked to the Charter Mark

3.6 In addition to the learning development programme itself (activity reported to the Committee in the annual report) there are also other areas of work which will be used as evidence towards Charter Mark accreditation.

Be A Councillor Campaign

3.7 The Council has undertaken a new campaign linked to the LGA 'Be A Councillor' project. A web page has been created setting out lots of information on the role of councillor, support available and links to relevant information at the LGA.

3.8 The Communications Team have also worked to support the campaign with pop-up banners set out in the town hall, splash ads on poster boards and significant social media activity.

3.9 Then during the autumn two in-person events were held involving councillors from Tower Hamlets and elsewhere engaging as panel members or speakers giving their experience and advice to potential new councillors. The second of the two events was specifically aimed at women. A colleague from the LGA co-hosted both events with officers.

3.10 Both in person events were well attended and there was good engagement from those present. There were around 35 present at the first session and around 20 at the second and indications are that these are significantly higher numbers than many authorities achieve. The Council has been asked to write a short case study for the LGA on how the events were organised and presented.

Young Mayor

3.11 The Council has an active young mayor programme with the current young mayor, Fetuma Hassan, elected in 2023. Alongside the young mayor five other young people are elected as deputies and lead for particular issues such as the environment or education.

3.12 The young mayor and deputies have wide ranging roles and are often seen at local events and workshops representing young people.

3.13 They also have good online and social media presence.

Democracy activities with local schools

3.14 The Democratic Services team have an ongoing project to engage with local primary schools in relation to local democracy. The school children are invited into the town hall to meet the Speaker and to hold a debate in the council chamber. They also learn about local democracy and the role of councillors and the mayor.

3.15 Sessions can be run during any quieter period through the year and generally 3-5 school groups are supported to visit each year.

Timetable for achieving accreditation

3.16 Initial informal discussions indicate that the Council may now be ready to seek LGA Charter Mark accreditation. Officers are in the process of gathering the evidence set out in the table above and entering it into the accreditation systems.

3.17 Should the above exercise conclude that all requirements are covered then the accreditation itself is provisionally booked to take place at the end of February 2025.

Charter Mark or Charter Mark Plus

3.18 During initial discussions it became apparent that the Council may well have achieved the level required for Charter Mark Plus in many areas and so officers were asked by the Member Development Steering Group to consider whether the Council should seek the higher-level accreditation instead.

3.19 The key challenge to this is that the accreditation processes are different and so seeking the higher level but missing out may also mean missing out on the standard Charter Mark as not all relevant criteria would have been assessed.

3.20 The main 'gap' for Charter Mark Plus was engagement with partners on the Learning and Development programme. This hadn't been prioritised as it isn't a criteria for the standard charter mark.

3.21 Having reviewed the data and requirements, officers view is that attempting to seek Charter Plus at this point would delay the whole process and it would be sensible to achieve the Charter Mark as soon as practicable and then work to upgrade to Charter Plus after that.

Next Steps

- 3.22 The Committee are asked to review this report and comment as appropriate. As set out, the Council intends to seek accreditation at the end of February. Progress will be reported to a later meeting of the Committee.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Providing support to all Councillors is a particular target of the Charter Mark evaluation with one specific strand being to review training engagement against protected characteristics.
- 4.2 It is therefore anticipated that achieving the Charter Mark will be helpful in ensuring proper support is available to all Members.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.
 - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.
- 5.2 Not specific to this report but Members who are well equipped to undertake their roles are in a better position to help the Council in all the above areas.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The Council has a dedicated budget of £60k for members' training and any resources required for obtaining the LGA Charter Mark will be met from existing capacity.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires a local authority to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its Members and co-opted Members.
- 7.2 It is for the individual local authority to decide how it meets this requirement, although every local authority is required to have a Code of Conduct.
- 7.3 This report demonstrates the Council's compliance with the above legislation.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- Initial report on the Charter Mark process 7 December 2023.

Appendices

- None.

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None.

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A