



North West Employers

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CHORLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**NORTH WEST CHARTER
ON MEMBER DEVELOPMENT**

LEVEL TWO

VERIFICATION VISIT

ON

26 AUGUST AND 1 OCTOBER 2009

CHORLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**NORTH WEST CHARTER
ON MEMBER DEVELOPMENT**

VERIFICATION VISIT

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Chorley Borough Council

North West Charter on Member Development

Verification Visit

Level Two verification visits to authorities are undertaken by an Elected Member, an Officer and an Academic. On this occasion Councillor Kevin Cluskey, Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority, Ruth Ashworth, Head of Corporate Projects and Assessment, North West Employers, and Liz Richardson, Research Fellow, Manchester University, conducted the verification visits. Unfortunately Councillor Cluskey was unable to attend on 26 August but did attend on 1 October.

The purpose of the visits was to verify the information submitted by the authority in their application which was presented for assessment for the Charter on Member development.

The format of the visits was a series of face to face interviews with Elected Members, Community Representatives and Officers from the local authority. Whilst the content of the individual interviews is confidential, the information gathered has been used to support the submission made by the local authority.

The following people were seen during the visit on 26 August:

Ishbel Murray	Corporate Director
Liz Morey	Co-ordinator (Neighbourhoods)
Alan Harris/Az Khan	Neighbourhood Police Team Representatives
Councillor Debra Platt	Lead Member
Councillor John Walker	Chair of Member Support Working Group
Councillor Peter Goldsworthy	Leader of the Council
Darren Cranshaw	Chair of Brindle Parish Council
Councillor Harold Heaton	Chair of Development Control Committee
Councillor Stella Walsh	Randomly Selected Member
Councillor Julia Berry	Randomly Selected Member
Carol Russell/Dianne Scambler	Officers Responsible

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The following people were seen during the visit on 1 October:

Councillor June Molyneaux	Randomly Selected Member
Darryn Griffiths	Tatton Community Centre Representative
Councillor John Walker	Chair of Member Support Working Group
Councillor Tony Gee	Vice Chair of Member Support Working Group
Councillor Peter Malpas	Randomly Selected Member
Donna Hall	Chief Executive

Thanks to all those above who gave their time so generously on the days.

Evidence Presented to Support Submission

The evidence examined has been drawn from two sources. Firstly, from the application provided by the authority and, secondly, from the information gathered at the interviews. The evidence has been organised against the eight elements of the application form which are based on the Elected Member Development Charter. Members were asked a variety of questions depending upon their role.

Q1. Issues for Authority and Community

This application was focussed on Neighbourhood Working. The authority wanted to build on their existing strengths in this area with initiatives such as SWITCH and Clayton Brook Together and move towards a more effective approach which involved all Members.

This area was well evidenced at the verification visits and demonstrated a clear understanding of the key issues for the Council and the local communities. Members talked about linking issues together with other bodies, eg highways with the County Council. They talked about youth issues, carrying out a play survey, and working with the Police and the parishes. They talked about accessing funds to move community issues forwards, eg the campaign on dog fouling.

There was recognition that the 47 Members on Chorley Council were very active ward Councillors with a fairly comprehensive knowledge of their area and the issues of public concern. The Neighbourhood Working Project was intending to use this knowledge and add to it. There was a hope that it would provide more learning and development about both shared concerns in communities in the borough, and how best to tackle these with partners.

Q2. Assessing Member Learning Development Needs

Ward walks acted as a way to uncover Members' learning and development needs, coupled with the Personal Development Plans that are in place.

Some Members were clear that the first round of ward walks were a needs analysis process and that these needs were picked up in the programme offered afterwards. The authority had just embarked upon a second round of neighbourhood visits, and these too were expected to come up with a series of training needs for Members.

Q3. Member Learning and Development Offered

Members mentioned that they were offered a variety of training and development activity as part of the Neighbourhood Working Project. One Member said that the 'Planning in practise' session was a very good session, especially as it was run as a workshop rather than a session where Members were talked at. The session had also been run for parish councils and one Member said she supported this and had encouraged parishes to go. Several Members said that Parish Councillors now had a better knowledge of where they could object more effectively on planning applications.

Members interviewed saw the ward walks as a development activity for Officers, and as good way to develop action plans and actions. Members said the initial ward visits had been an opportunity to better develop relationships between themselves and Officers. One Member said "it was interesting to meet Officers I didn't know before".

The interviews produced very positive evidence that the bus tour was a learning activity for all involved.

Q4. Aims of Member Learning and Development

In the application Chorley said they wanted Members to achieve some of the following aims from the programme:

- A better awareness of issues and a wider understanding of the extent of the issues – Members confirmed that they had learned a lot about local issues, especially those that went across the borough.
- To learn from solutions in place elsewhere across the borough – Members felt they had gained some good ideas which they would be able to put into practise when appropriate.
- An understanding of the roles and responsibilities of partners (Police, housing associations, PCT, Parish and County Council) – One of the evaluation comments from the recent ward visit on 28 September was:

"It's really useful to get everyone on site. It puts issues in perspective and now with all the key partners on the tour we have the necessary information and can come up with solutions or actions – or sometimes find the route to other funding."

- An understanding of the funding sources available from outside the Council – this aim was an unqualified success. Several members mentioned how useful this session had been to them and mentioned either applying for funding themselves

or encouraging constituents to apply for funding with the help of the relevant Officer.

Q5. Quality of Member Learning and Development

There was evidence that levels of participation in Member learning and development were high and had increased.

Members mentioned how useful they had found the learning hours. Officers checked the quality of the learning hours, eg amount of chalk and talk, time for questions, and the sessions were adapted as necessary. The authority had had a review of the training sessions and Members had said they wanted the sessions to be more specific, possibly with fewer slides and handouts. Members wanted the sessions to help them answer queries and make effective decisions.

The training and development group evaluated the training after each session, looking at the 'happy sheets' and discussing the informal comments. The authority was just starting with a second round of visits to each of the neighbourhood areas and these tours were being evaluated after the end of each one. Some of the comments were:

"It's good to have that direct dialogue with partners on site."

"It was great to have a representative from Redrow Homes on the tour with us to discuss longstanding problems"

Q6. Contribution of Member Learning and Development to Outcomes

There were a lot of general comments about the value of Member learning as an activity and the need for Member learning and development to help Members carry out their roles effectively.

Accessing resources training contributed to outcomes, eg Lottery grants. Most Members interviewed mentioned this training session and how they had been able to make use of it to further projects in their neighbourhood.

The bus tour generated an appreciation of the bigger picture, a shared understanding of problems and ideas for solutions. Members saw how similar their issues were to those of neighbouring wards and discussed how they could work together to solve those issues. Dog fouling was an example of an issue which was across the borough and there was now a campaign in place to reduce this.

Officers felt that the ward walks had helped clarify the roles and responsibilities of different agencies. Members felt that the walks and tours had given them a greater appreciation of the different interest groups present in the borough, eg County Council, Police, Parish Council, housing association, developers, and they had made a good start in beginning to work better together to both understand and resolve community issues.

Q7. Strategic and Corporate Context

Neighbourhood working is clearly listed in the Corporate Strategy. The strategy itself is discussed widely in the authority by staff during 'listening days' by the Management Team, Cabinet, and Full Council.

The initiative itself, 'Neighbourhood Working', is a drilled down version of the community strategy which is all about improving community capacity. We are aiming to support people so they are empowered to improve their own communities. One of the intentions is to transfer one asset a year to the community.

Q8. Overall impacts

There was strong evidence from the visits of evidence of impact for two community partners, a parish council and a community centre. The parish council thought that links between themselves and the borough council had strengthened. They commented that they only used to see refuse collectors from the borough council, but now had had the opportunity to go on a ward walk and attend planning training. In addition, local Councillors were playing an active part in the parish (coming to parish meetings, being more informed about parish issues, supporting parish initiatives).

One Member said: "It's working", they were on the PACT and thought that there were good relationships between the authority, the Police and the parish council. These hadn't been as good several years ago; they thought communication between the bodies was now much better.

One of the strengths on both days was the impact of the Accessing Ward Resources training. Members all said how useful they had found it. One Member mentioned getting £500. They found it useful themselves and also to inform or advise constituents.

Statements on the days and written documents emphasised that Neighbourhood Working is at a very early stage and that many of the neighbourhood/community outcomes from the Neighbourhoods Action Plans will take longer to happen. This was not interpreted as

negative in any way, but as evidence that the strategy was still maturing.

Continuous Improvement

Although the purpose of the visit was to assess the submission for the Charter, it was also an ideal opportunity to discuss what improvements the authority would hope to make within the next three years.

All those interviewed were asked at the end of their interview what improvements they could suggest. They are recorded below to act as a reference point when the Charter is re-assessed in three years.

As training and development for Members improves there are fewer suggestions, as the Members feel that everything they consider reasonable is already being provided. This has appeared to be a recent trend over the last year or so.

- Hopefully Members will come out with more needs from the second round of ward visits.
- Would like the Neighbourhood Working Project to become mainstream.
- Would like Neighbourhood Working to keep going and be sustained
- Would like all Members to take part in Member development on a regular basis.
- Would like more Members to deliver learning themselves.
- Need to continue to find new ways to engage Members.

Special Mention

Obviously, the intention of the Charter is to encourage local authorities to adopt the key practice points but, within the standard framework, we hope to encourage and celebrate innovation and excellent practice.

Where we have found 'little gems', through the application form or interviews, we will take the opportunity to share these examples and give positive feedback to the authority:

- There was a strong energy and enthusiasm for the initiative. Members wanted to improve their communities and could see that Neighbourhood Working was a useful way to do this.
- The bus tour – all Members explained how useful they had found this. They thought that it had helped them see how issues cut across communities. They had the opportunity to discuss issues with the Officers, and they got ideas that they could use in the future.
- There was evidence of a change in the culture. The community representatives felt that there was a change in attitude from the Council towards empowering them to do things that would have an

impact, eg run their own community centre with a youth club, which was contributing to reducing petty crime and antisocial behaviour in that area.

Assessors' Comments

Overall, the Council has made a clear commitment to the development of their Elected Members that was evident from the application form and the visits. As part of the authority's continuous improvement process, the assessors felt that the authority's Member development could be strengthened in the following areas:

- It may be useful to follow up some of the training needs expressed by Members or some of the learning hour sessions and check that the training content was sufficient to enable Members to answer casework queries and make decisions.
- It may be useful to have the Member Development Group review the learning and development strategy and approach. Possibly involving a learning and development specialist to focus on how people learn and the evaluation process.
- It may be useful to do further work on linking the corporate aims and objectives to Member development in the authority.

Recommendation from the Verification Team

Having reviewed all the evidence, it is our view that the Chorley Borough Council meets the standards set out in the North West Charter on Member Development for Level Two.

Signed: _____

**Ruth Ashworth, Head of Corporate Projects and Assessment
North Western Local Authorities' Employers' Organisation**

Signed: _____

**Councillor Kevin Cluskey
Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority**

Signed: _____

**Liz Richardson
Research Fellow, Manchester University**