

Charter Plus achieved by Bracknell Forest Council using www.three60degree.co.uk

This case study describes how Bracknell Forest Council achieved the Charter Plus for Member Development and supported the training needs analysis process for a pilot group of councillors.

Highlights

- Achievement of Charter Plus
- Creation of Three60degree Feedback Champions
- Council-wide engagement in the process
- Individual feedback received from partner agencies and members of the public
- Development of integrated Personal Development Planning documentation
- Informed the annual training programme and four year development programme
- Member development now an embedded part of the council's culture

Learning and Development Challenges

Ann Moore is Bracknell Forest's Head of Democratic and Registration Services. She describes the major challenges she faces in her job as follows:

First, engaging members in learning as elected members are a busy and diverse group of individuals

Second, money is always tight and there is a need to maximise available resources.

Third, responding to change because local and national council objectives are constantly changing and councillors need to be prepared to respond.

Background

Bracknell Forest Council is a unitary local authority in Berkshire, South East England. It provides a range of educational, social services, leisure and planning services to residents of the town of Bracknell and neighbouring villages.

Employing around 4,000 staff serving a relatively compact area, it is a smaller unitary authority but **Bracknell Forest prides itself that it “punches above its weight” in terms of delivery.**

Context

Bracknell Forest Council has 42 councillors who come from a spectrum of different backgrounds, have diverse development needs and are being asked to demonstrate a wide range of skills.

Bracknell Forest Council committed to attaining the Member Development Charter in October 2004 and a Member Development Strategy was agreed by all members of the Council. A cross-party member steering group led the process and the Council was awarded the Charter in April 2006 and was successfully re-assessed in September 2009. 76% of elected members completed a basic training needs analysis process and developed personal development plans.

Bracknell Forest Council recognises the importance of learning and development for all those who work to deliver good public services and has sought to continuously improve this for its councillors. The Charter provides a robust, structured framework designed to help the authority enhance councillor learning and support for their role.



The Problem

The Council wanted to achieve the more stringent Charter Plus standard which involved completing a pilot three 60 degree feedback exercise. Being successfully re-elected had long been seen by elected members as the surest measure of councillors' ability and performance. The development of the IDeA Skills Framework set out six skill set areas: Community Leadership; Scrutiny and Challenge; Communication Skills; Regulating and Monitoring; Working in Partnership and Political Understanding. However it was only with the introduction of the new Charter Plus standard that Councils, engaged in the initiative, were asked how their elected members were being performance monitored and proposed using three 60 degree feedback as a tool to achieve this.

Timothy Wheadon, Chief Executive, said that "Our commitment to the Charter means that we are developing elected members who are well placed to deliver our objectives and to improve services to the community, with a good understanding of changing needs and priorities and the ability to respond to our diverse communities."

The challenge was to ensure that elected members engaged with the pilot exercise and it was essential therefore that this was delivered as a development opportunity with tangible outcomes.

The New Processes

Ann Moore investigated different delivery options for the three 60 degree pilot and was introduced to Alex Knapp from The Grey Matter who was working with Bracknell Forest's Learning and Development team on another project. Ann and Alex discussed The Grey Matter's three 60 degree feedback solution hosted via www.three60degree.co.uk. The Grey Matter wanted to test and enhance their three 60 degree feedback website and saw this as a development opportunity, therefore no costs were incurred for the use of the system.

The approach used was simple. Member role descriptions were finalised for each role within the authority from Ward Councillor to Leader setting out both the **Key duties and responsibilities** and the **Key Skills and Knowledge**. A set of statements were created to match each role on the assumption that every councillor is a Ward Councillor with every additional responsibility as an extension of that role.

Each elected member involved in the pilot was reviewed against a set of statements appropriate to their role, for example, Ward Councillor plus Chairman. The elected members evaluated themselves against a set of statements choosing from a range of options about their performance for each activity (Always to Never). The self-assessment review took about 30 minutes to complete. Each elected member then identified a list of up to ten reviewers (minimum eight) who were asked to anonymously participate in contributing feedback. The list of reviewers was again reflective of their role with Executive Members expected to include the Leader, external partner agencies, a Director and where appropriate members of the public.

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The New Processes continued...

Reviewers received an email requesting their participation with access to the relevant feedback form and all they had to do was click on the button in the email to start giving feedback.

When a minimum of five reviewers had completed feedback responses, a short report was generated giving a comparison between the individual's perception of their performance and a summary of reviewers' perceptions of the same activities. A free text section was also included for general feedback, which was again anonymous. The elected member was provided with a copy of the summary report and invited to participate in a feedback session.

As this was a pilot exercise, an external consultant was engaged to facilitate feedback discussions. Future projects would aim for this to be carried out internally to ensure that all learning is retained and utilised within integrated Personal Development Planning documentation.

Going Forward

The most visible results have been the achievement of Charter Plus and development of eight advocates for the 360 degree feedback method as a means to identify development needs. In addition the development needs outcomes informed the annual training programme and the Council has developed a varied and challenging four year learning and development programme which allows Members to develop, gain new skills and to access a variety of learning methods that enable members to contribute effectively to delivering the Council's ambitious plans for the community.

Overall, the success of the initiative can be judged by the fact that Bracknell Forest Council has already commenced a second pilot group consisting of Executive Members, with a view to the Member Development Charter Steering Group deciding on the value of www.three60degree.co.uk being used for a wider audience. Member development is now an embedded part of the council's culture and supporting the initiative represents a sound public investment in raising the standard of member learning and increasing members' capacity.

“At a time when the pace of change in local government seems unrelenting it is important that elected members are given the best possible support within the resources at their disposal to enable them to be effective champions for the community.” Councillor Paul Bettison, Council Leader

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