DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE –
20TH SEPTEMBER 2023

SUBJECT: **CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSALS TO REPLACE THE WALES CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT**

REPORT BY: **CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consult with the Committee on the proposals to replace the Wales Charter for Members Support and Development with a Voluntary Self Evaluation Framework as described in Appendix 1 to this report. The views of the Committee will be conveyed to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) following this meeting.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 To provide feedback to the WLGA on the proposals to replace the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are asked to consider and comment the consultation document at Appendix 1 to this report in order to provide feedback to the WLGA.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 To respond to the formal consultation of the WLGA.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 The Council has always recognised the importance of supporting Members' many and varied roles through a programme of targeted training and development. Indeed, the Council was the first in Wales to be awarded the WLGA's Wales Charter for Member Support and Development in 2007. The last award was received in 2019 and expired in 2022.

5.2 However, as members training provision has developed and evolved since the introduction of the Charter, it has become clear that there is now a need for a different framework which reflects a more progressive approach to sector led improvement, recent WG legislation, statutory and other guidance and which recognises the increasingly limited resources available in councils.

5.3 Members will be aware from a separate report on this agenda that targeted Member Training and Development will continue in the interim, however views are now sought on the replacement voluntary self-evaluation framework for councils to use to assess the effectiveness of the support they provide for councillors. This framework is a modernisation of the former Wales Charter for Councillor Support and Development which it replaces.

5.4 The views of the committee will be fed back to the WLGA following this meeting. Following the conclusion of this consultation, the WLGA intends to issue the framework as a shared support resource to all councils to use as they consider appropriate.

5.5 **Conclusion**

Members views are sought on the consultation document set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 No assumptions have been made in relation to the content of this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 As this is a response to a consultation document no integrated impact assessment is required.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Member training and development will be met from existing budgets.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The views of the consultees are reflected within the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Wales Measure 2011

Author: Lisa Lane Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Consultees: Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive
Dave Street, Deputy Chief Executive
Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services
Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director Communities and Economy
Steve Harris, Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer
Emma Sullivan Senior Committee Services Officer
Cath Forbes-Thompson, Scrutiny Manager
Councillor M James Chair Democratic Services Committee
Councillor L Phipps Vice Chair Democratic Services Committee
Councillor Nigel George, Cabinet Member Corporate Services and Property

Appendices:

Appendix 1   Consultation Document.

From Charter to Self-Assessment, the Evolution of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development
Consultation July 2023
Background

Twenty years ago, support and development for councillors in Wales was less well established than it is today. In 2002, the first improvement team at the WLGA (then Syniad), worked with every council and a cross party group of councillors to identify what further support and training opportunities councillors would find useful. Councils requested that good practice in this area should be agreed, described, and disseminated.

In response to this request, and in line with wider UK practice, the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development was co- developed by the WLGA and councils to:

- provide a framework for good practice across Wales,
- be an incentive for councils to provide their councillors with the support and development they needed, and
- provide assurance to councillors that they were being given the best support possible.

Over the last 20 years, the Charter has been further developed and instrumental in both enabling and recognising local good practice. The majority of councils, national parks and fire and rescue authorities have been awarded the Charter, whilst others have used it as a framework to identify good practice and check that they have effective support mechanisms in place.

Since the inception of the Charter, the local government landscape has changed significantly. The role of councillors has become even more challenging and wide ranging. Resources are scarce and ways of working post Covid radically different. Councils now have more sophisticated and well-established approaches to councillor support. The Welsh Government has introduced legislation with statutory guidance for councillors and democratic services. The improvement landscape has also evolved. In 2021-22 a new Improvement Programme was launched to support sector-led improvement across local government in Wales. Leaders and chief executives have expressed a commitment to sector-led improvement, underpinned by peer challenge, support and mutual aid.

Against this backdrop, the Charter has been reviewed by the WLGA and councils represented by their Heads of Democratic Services. We recognise that although the Charter provided a framework for good practice, impetus for, and recognition of councillor support in the past, there is now a need for a different framework which reflects a more progressive approach to sector led improvement, recent WG legislation, statutory and other guidance and which recognises the increasingly limited resources available in councils.

A Councillor Support Self-Assessment Framework.

Proposal

We propose that the existing Charter be replaced by a voluntary self-assessment framework that focusses on the support provided for councillors to deliver the outcomes needed by their communities. The framework aims to cover all aspects of good practice in councillor support. However, as priorities and resources differ between councils, it would be for councils to decide locally how much of the framework to use and which sections should be prioritised.

The framework would be developed according to the following principles:

1. Aims of the framework
- To provide assurance to councils that councillors are provided with the support, information, guidance, and development needed to enable them to secure the best possible outcomes for their communities.
- To provide an ambitious but pragmatic national framework of good practice which recognises legislative requirements, statutory and other guidance, the expressed needs of councillors and widely accepted examples of what works.

2. Principles for development
- To develop the framework collaboratively with councils, WLGA and other stakeholders to ensure that it meets needs and reflects national aspirations.
- To develop a framework which works with the wider programme for improvement and self-assessment in Wales with a potential to develop as part of the peer review programme if required. Councils may decide that this self-assessment should be led by democratic services committees.
- To develop a framework that reflects the needs of all councillors regardless of political party or independent status.
- To provide opportunities for practice sharing between councils.

3. Scope of the framework
The framework would cover:
- support and development for councillors in the widest sense to incorporate support provided by the whole council. Including, but not limited to, for example, democratic services, legal, digital, communications, learning and development teams, and directorates in their support for scrutiny, the executive and frontline councillors,
- the needs of all councillors before election, as new members and as experienced politicians,
- all councillor roles both within the council and in the community,
- the personal and 'professional' support to councillors within the influence of councils and
- the expectations placed on councils, officers, and councillors themselves.

4. Context
The framework will take account of, for example: the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper,

the [WLGA Exit Surveys,](#) the [WG survey of councillors,](#) the [Civility in public life initiative,](#) the WG [Guidance for Principal Councils](#) and the emerging local government improvement and self-assessment framework.

5. An example framework for discussion

The framework below is based on the proposed aims and principles and offered as a starting point for discussions between all stakeholders. Councils are invited to comment on the suitability of the framework as a shared, national foundation document that councils can use to develop their own approach to self-assessment recognising their local needs and priorities.

Democracy	Outcomes sought:
	People are encouraged and enabled to stand for office. **Councillors understand their role and undertake it effectively and ethically.** **Councillors can participate equally in council business.** **Councillors are provided with the support, information, and resources they need.** **Councillors represent the diversity of the people they serve.** **Councillors are safe and protected from harm.**
Theme	**Questions to ask**
Candidates and prospective candidates	Does the council provide comprehensive information to prospective and official candidates about the role of the councillor, the council and any associated responsibilities and benefits? Are the approaches to the outreach to and information for prospective candidates made according to the need to encourage diversity in candidates and informed by the council's Diversity Declaration? Does the council signpost prospective candidates to information provided by the WG, WLGA, Electoral Commission and other organisations providing information for candidates? Do councillors, the council and local parties promote fair and respectful campaigning initiatives? Are prospective candidates informed about support for standing such as the Access to Elected Office fund? Are prospective candidates informed of the expectations placed on them to take part in induction and continuing professional development some of which will be mandatory?
Councillors understand their role, responsibilities, and accountabilities.	Are all councillors, when elected or when being selected for a specialist position, provided with information and guidance about all aspects of their role? Are all members provided with a competency framework to understand the skills and knowledge required of councillors? Have role descriptions (see WLGA models for examples) been formally adopted by the council and agreed by individual councillors?

	Have councillors serving on outside bodies been provided with: • guidance on their role and responsibilities, • legal information such as their accountabilities and interests, • an explanation of the expectations placed on them by their nominating council, • requirements for communication with and reporting back from the outside body?
Standards of conduct	Do all councillors understand their responsibilities in adhering to the local code of conduct? Have they received local guidance and any information provided by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales? Do standards committees and chairs understand their particular roles and responsibilities? Do political group leaders promote and maintain high standards of conduct and cooperate with the standards committee? Have all councillors formally committed to undertake all aspects of their role with civility and respect towards each other, the public and officers in all settings and media? Are instances of bullying, harassment and intimidation dealt with quickly and effectively?
The constitution	Do all councillors understand the constitution including: • the roles, responsibilities, and limits to the roles of committees, • the role of individual councillors and officers, • councillor /officer protocols, • meeting practice, • standing orders, • rules of debate, • public engagement, • roles on the council where councillor training is deemed mandatory?
Officer support	Does every committee, panel, forum etc. have an appropriate level of officer support? Are councillors supported adequately in their collaborative and joint work with other councils or organisations, for example on corporate joint committees? Are councillors supported in their community and case work? Are all councillors provided with the information and research they are entitled to according to the requirements of the statutory guidance issued under section 8 (1A) of the Local Government Wales Measure 2011. i.e. All councillors are proactively and also in response to specific requests, provided with information, data, briefing and training relating to their decision making, committee work and community and casework. This service is:

	• provided equitably to all members according to a published protocol which includes standards and response times, • exclusive of information for party political use, • provided confidentially where necessary and with due regard to data protection and other information law, • undertaken by the council or external agencies, • proportionate and provided within available resources. Democratic services committees ensure that the service is effective and adequately resourced. Do overview and scrutiny committees have dedicated support from officers who can provide impartial research, support, and advice? Has the nature of any support information including research services has been clearly publicised and explained to all councillors?
Equality of access	Are the arrangements made for the business of the council flexible and do they enable councillors to participate fully regardless of personal circumstances? Do meeting times, modes and venues reflect the expressed needs of councillors as closely as possible? Do councillors have equal access to meetings regardless of any protected characteristics? Do the arrangements for multi-location meetings meet the needs of councillors? Are councillors and other meeting participants able to use both Welsh and English in meetings? Do council recess times reflect the needs of councillors with, for example, caring responsibilities? Are job share arrangements for cabinet members supported so that the workload is clear and appropriate? Are occasional physical spaces available for informal meetings on request?
Support for councillors' rights, safety, and wellbeing	Are councillors provided with guidance on their rights and benefits. For example, salaries, family absence, job sharing for members of the executive/cabinet, allowances, tax and benefits, pensions, indemnities, data protection and freedom of information? Are councillors actively encouraged to take up the salaries and allowances they are entitled to and is foregoing allowances and salaries actively discouraged? Does the council have an informal duty of care in place which demonstrates a proactive commitment to protecting councillors' health and wellbeing? Is this recorded and available for members to view? Does it set out the nature of any support available to councillors for example counselling and health checks and those responsible for helping councillors access this support? Are councillors provided with guidance on maintaining their wellbeing and personal safety? For example, lone working, bullying and harassment?

	Does the council act proactively to support councillors who experience bullying and harassment, including liaison with the police if appropriate?
Diversity	Has the council's Diversity Declaration been agreed by the Full Council? Is it monitored? Does the Diversity Declaration set out the actions that the council takes to ensure that councillors from underrepresented groups are actively encouraged to stand and given positions of responsibility wherever possible? Are councillors with special access requirements supported in their work in the council and community?
Digital	Have all councillors been provided with the equipment or funding to buy equipment, software, apps and connectivity required to undertake their role in the council offices, at home and when travelling in the council area? Does this include smart phones and laptops/tablets? Has full training been provided in the use of equipment and packages? Is technical support available? Are councillors sufficiently supported in their attendance at multilocation meetings? Are councillors supported in the use of social media through guidance on its use and online safety?

Community	**Outcomes sought:** • **Councillors lead, represent, advocate for, and enable their communities.** • **Councillors make sure that local resources are available and maximised.** • **Councillors encourage citizen participation and innovation.** • **Councillors work with communities to make them sustainable and resilient.**
Theme	**Questions to ask**
Public awareness	Does the council ensure that the public understand the role and responsibilities of councillors and of local MSs', MPs and community and town councillors? Do people know which tier of representative should be contacted for different local issues? Does the council publicise and promote the value of councillors to the community?
Communities contacting councillors	Are systems in place for local residents and community groups to contact their local ward councillor, and/or councillors with specific roles, if appropriate? Are these systems and standards for their application clearly articulated and publicised to the public and councillors?
Surgeries and community meetings	Is the support provided by the council for councillors to organise surgeries and community meetings adequate? Do the relevant officers attend community meetings when requested by councillors where appropriate?

	Is the extent of the support available to councillors clearly articulated to all councillors?
Community engagement, leadership, and co-production	Are councillors informed, supported and resourced to enable their communities to be sustainable and resilient through, for example: • formal and informal community consultation • joint working with community leaders to meet needs at a local level, • co-production with local people of policies and actions which lead to successful communities? Is this support for councillors clearly articulated to all councillors?
Casework support	Are adequate systems in place to support councillors in their casework? Is this support: • provided equitably to all members according to a published protocol, • exclusive of party-political activities, • provided confidentially where necessary and with due regard to data protection and other information law, • proportionate and provided within available resources. Are councillors provided with guidance on managing casework. Through, for example casework management systems?
Oversight and safety	Does the council have clear protocols in place for protecting the personal safety and wellbeing of councillors which are clearly articulated to councillors and the public? Are the expectations and access of the community managed so that councillors are not contacted inappropriately? Are councillors provided with information and guidance on managing their relationships with the public and maintaining appropriate boundaries?

Learning	**Outcome sought:** **Councillors have the skills and knowledge to deliver what local people need.**
Themes	**Questions to ask**
The Councillor Development Strategy	Does the council have an effective and defined approach to councillor development which includes the expressed needs of every councillor and the needs of the organisation and community?
Personal development reviews	Does the council provide all councillors with useful personal support and development reviews undertaken by people competent to do so?
A learning and development Programme.	Does the council have an annual learning and development programme fully promoted to councillors? Can all councillors access the programme equally?

	Is the programme regularly monitored, evaluated, and updated? Are councillors able to identify positive outcomes from the training such as improved understanding and performance and specific outcomes for the community?
Induction	Are all new or returning councillors provided with a comprehensive, prioritised, multi session, programme of induction which enables councillors to participate effectively during their first year of office?
Quality of development	Do councillors believe that the learning activities are sufficiently stimulating, relevant and provided in progressive and appropriate styles? Does the council have a systematic and effective approach to commissioning, developing, delivering, and evaluating its training and development activities?
Participation	Do councillors attend all the development opportunities that are relevant to them? Is any non-participation addressed?
Learning from others	Do councillors participate in shared regional and national development opportunities? Are councillors encouraged and supported to collaborate with other councils and national bodies to act as political peers, mentors and in networks to share approaches to the role of councillor, identify good practice and to contribute to sector led improvement?