

Charter/Charter Plus Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Member Development Charter?

The Charter is a statement of your council's commitment to developing and supporting its elected councillors. It aims to help councils adopt a structured approach to councillor development and to building elected member capacity.

2. What is the Charter Plus, and how does that fit in?

Charter Plus is an optional higher level of the Member Development Charter. It has been developed for 2 main reasons:

- To provide further challenge for councils that have already been awarded the Charter and want to further improve their member development and support arrangements;
- To address the growing interest in the wider member development debate in that it challenges councils to make further achievements in terms of councillor support, promoting local democracy as well as in their approach to member training.

3. How does the Charter Assessment process work?

The first stage is getting agreement within the authority, from officers and members that you wish to work towards gaining the Charter. Once agreement has been reached, the authority will sign a written commitment, which LGYH keeps.

It is important to note, that the assessment will look at outcomes, as well as the implementation of development activities. The authority must be able to demonstrate a culture of member development, which has been embedded into everyday work. For authorities looking to achieve the Charter for the first time, the process may take up to 18 months from signing the commitment.

The next stage is to undertake a self assessment, using criteria on the IDeA website. From this, the MDO or relevant officer should put together an action plan which seeks to address any areas where further evidence of work is required, and how the information is going to be collated. LGYH are able to offer support at this stage if required, and it is recommended that officers talk to other authority officers who have undertaken the process already.

The MDO will then arrange for LGYH to carry out a pre-assessment. This will be carried out by 1 or 2 LGYH representatives, and will take 1 day. The pre-assessment team look at the portfolio of evidence, meet with members of the Member Development Working Group and talk to

the MDO. Following this, LGYH will provide feedback, advising of any evidence gaps.

Once the MDO feels these gaps have been addressed, the MDO will arrange the assessment day. This will have to be arranged in advance, as the assessors will need to meet with the Leader, Chief Executive and members from a number of different political parties during the day.

LGYH will send a letter following the assessment, confirming whether the Charter standard has been achieved. They will then send a draft assessment report within 28 days of the assessment.

The authority is given the opportunity to make factual changes to the report, and correct any inaccuracies, before the final approved report is sent.

If they have achieved the Charter standard, the authority should decide on how they wish the award to be presented – eg. at a meeting of full council and LGYH will arrange for representatives to attend to present the award. The Charter lasts for 3 years, at which point the authority must decide if they wish to go for reassessment or Charter Plus.

4. What exactly does getting Charter/Charter Plus mean for the authority?

Your council will be building elected member capacity in-line with what is recognised as good practice. This not only benefits councillors individually, it will mean that elected members are better placed to serve their local communities. It also can show people external to the Council, such as the Audit Commission, that the council is committed to member development, including attracting new councillors. Another advantage to you is that many authorities in Yorkshire and Humber have also signed up to the Charter, and can share learning, expertise and experience.

The award itself will be presented to the Council at a ceremony. Officers may wish to invite senior politicians, local media and Councillors, to promote the achievement.

5. Who will carry out the assessments?

Assessments will be carried out by the following team:

1 LGYH representative

1 or 2 Independent Panel members

1 Peer member, from an authority that has achieved the Charter

LGYH will be offering a training event in April 2010, for any MDO's from across the region, who may be interested in training to become an independent panel member. This role will entail passing on experience

of member development in your own authority and using it as part of the assessment and will help MDOs improve their own knowledge of how other authorities support members. LGYH will be putting together a pool of independent panel members. This will mean that when choosing panel members for the assessment, they can choose officers from a similar type of authority, and means that panel members can choose when they want to take part.

6. Once we've achieved the Charter, when do we get reassessed?

Charter and Charter Plus last for 3 years from when they are awarded. Once the 3 years have elapsed, authorities have a further 12 months in which to undergo reassessment, or be assessed for Charter Plus. If at this stage there is no longer evidence to meet the minimum Charter standard, the award will be removed.

7. Once we have Charter, do we have to progress to Charter Plus? What would happen if we went for it, but failed?

Going for Charter Plus is optional and it is accepted that there can be many reasons why a council might choose not to. LGYH will carry out a pre-assessment, once the self assessment has been undertaken. At this stage, they will advise whether the authority is likely to achieve Charter Plus, or if they should aim for Charter.

8. Is there any funding available to help authorities achieve the Charter standard?

The self assessment material produced by the IDeA is available for free from their website. The regional MDO Network is also a good resource for sharing ideas and best practice with other authorities who may have achieved the standard, or be going for it.

In addition, there may be some specific funding to assist authorities in meeting the costs of achieving the standard. Officers should contact LGYH for details.

9. Do we get any additional support from LGYH for member development services?

LGYH are responsible for overseeing member development across the region, and can provide advice and individual support to councils wishing to achieve Charter/Charter Plus. They will also provide additional support for smaller authorities looking to achieve the Charter, and work with regional partners to share best practice from across the country.

LGYH are also responsible for ensuring each authority is aware of when they are due for assessment/reassessment and for carrying out the assessments.

10. Have LGYH produced their own regional version of the IDeA Charter assessment guidelines?

LGYH use the IDeA Charter assessment guidelines, as they provide a national standard for member development.

However, if there are any particular requirements within the assessment guidelines which LGYH felt were unachievable within the region, they have the flexibility to work with the authority to look at alternative methods of demonstrating their commitment to this area of work.