

# MJ Achievement Awards

Application for Councillor Development  
Achievement of the Year



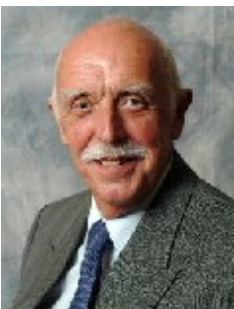
## SUMMARY

The culture amongst Members at Chorley Council is one of willingness to learn; a commitment to keep up to date with change; and to develop new skills to fulfil their roles as decision makers and community representatives. When Chorley Council introduced Neighbourhood Working as part of a wider programme of change, it was important that all Councillors were involved and engaged and were given the knowledge and skills to work with partners to develop their communities.

Structured ward walks, neighbourhood action planning; bus tours with partners and a programme of neighbourhood related learning helped deliver a corporate priority of implementing neighbourhood working – and to be one of only two district Council's in the North West to achieve level two of NW Employers Member Development Charter.



Councillor Peter Goldsworthy  
Leader of the Council



Councillor John Walker  
Executive Member and  
Chair of the Member Support Working Group

## OUR APPROACH

In 2008 on the recommendations of a Scrutiny Review, the Executive committed to the introduction of Neighbourhood Working in Chorley. Seven Neighbourhood Areas were created which reflected the urban and rural mix of the Borough.

Neighbourhood Working in Chorley is about action on the ground – seven virtual teams from across the Council which work together and with partners, the County and Parish Councils and local communities to take action to improve areas - it builds relationships that influence action.

Elected members of all parties had driven neighbourhood working and it was important they were involved with implementation and contributed to outcomes in their areas. This fits with the culture of Member Development that exists in Chorley. The Council was awarded level 1 of NW Employers Member Development Charter in 2006. The last CPA inspection report in 2008 said:

*“The Council has strengthened the capacity of managers and councillors through targeted development. The Council’s cross party approach to councillor development focuses on all aspects of training, development and support. Councillors have personal development plans and feel that they receive the development they need to be effective in their roles. This means that the Council has in place measures to ensure that leadership strength is maintained and improved”*

Member development and training is led by the Council’s Member Support Working Group, a cross party group dedicated to councillor development, chaired by an Executive Member. This Group led on the strategy and introduction of a Member development programme for Neighbourhood Working, working with key Executive Members and senior officers.

The programme was aimed at maximising the opportunity for Councillor involvement and learning. This was against a backdrop of detailed consultation with local residents and close working with partners – primarily Police, Housing Associations, County and Parish Councils.

## 5 STAGE PROGRAMME

**1 Ward Walks** – in 2008 all 47 Councillors took part in structured ward walks with the Director and key neighbourhood staff. They chose which localities or issues they visited, including their aspirations for future development and change.

**2 PDP reviews** – all Councillors undertook PDP reviews and an impressive 100% now have PDPs. The outcomes, along with learning issues identified through the Ward Walks process, helped develop a programme of neighbourhood related learning sessions.

**3 Neighbourhood Development Programme** – in 2008/09 this programme was delivered, using timetabled monthly Member Learning Sessions and included:

- Accessing Ward Resources
- Strategic Housing
- Planning in Practice Workshop (also repeated for Parish Councillors)
- New Waste Collection Service
- Vulnerable Families
- MATAC (Multi Agency Community Safety Initiative)
- Dog Fouling

**4 Action Plans and Bus Tour** – in early 2009 the 7 draft Neighbourhood Action Plans were launched on a tour of the Borough for Councillors to look at the wider picture of neighbourhood issues. This focussed on problem solving - potential solutions and potential funding sources.

**5 Neighbourhood Tours with Partners** – Councillors met in Neighbourhood Area Groups to sign off Action Plans, including allocation of additional funding. They also planned a Neighbourhood Tour of their area with key partners and agencies and other Councillors at Parish and County level - which took place in late summer/autumn 2009.

### **MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAMME**

Neighbourhood Working was a key project in the Council's Corporate Strategy. The Council has invested in the departmental structure to deliver Neighbourhood Working and is wholly committed to its success.

The Member Development programme was a supplementary project to support Councillors in their community champion role – it's why Councillors are elected and they were very enthusiastic.

The whole approach was project managed by Democratic Services staff who with the Member Support Working Group, promoted and evaluated the training and ensured the completion of Councillor PDPs. The programme slowed down for wider local consultation and speeded up as funding for projects was allocated. At every stage Members built on their existing knowledge and skills and their enthusiasm and commitment to their role was strengthened.

### **PARTNER INVOLVEMENT**

Partners' involvement was fundamental to the success of the programme. A multi-agency Steering Group led the process of implementation of Neighbourhood Working. Partners were kept informed about ward walk outcomes, helped form Action Plans and took part in Neighbourhood tours.

### **CHARTER 2 APPLICATION**

The Council decided to use the Member development programme as a basis for applying for level 2, the exemplar standard of the NW Employers Member Development Charter. The Council and the Member Support Working Group felt that in being reassessed for Charter 1, we could demonstrate a strong culture of learning which could earn us level 2. This also gave us the driver to maintain a quality programme throughout, with high levels of Member satisfaction.

### **THE LEARNING**

The learning for most Councillors was not about their own ward area – most Councillors know theirs inside out - but about how they could influence action on the ground or initiate change, for example:

- Looking at ward problems or issues with officers on site, learning about solutions which had worked elsewhere
- Hearing about other potential funding sources
- Understanding partner roles and responsibilities – particularly in complex land ownership situations
- Understanding how working together with partners on site can create new ideas and bring influence to resolve problems
- Learning about new neighbourhood teams and how they are tackling issues
- Understanding and being realistic in their expectations of what Neighbourhood Working can deliver for communities

Part of the Neighbourhood Working initiative is to have “weeks (or days) of action” – multi agency days of enforcement and other activities eg community skips, benefits advice to residents, in dedicated areas. Members help influence the area and issues tackled. They also linked in with the Council's civic pride campaign “the Chorley Smile”, encouraging citizens to do their bit to improve their neighbourhood.

### Councillor quote on Neighbourhood Tour

*“It’s really useful to get everyone on site. It puts issues in perspective and now with all key partners on the tour we can come up with solutions or actions – or find the route to other funding”*

### Councillor quote on Ward Walk

*“It’s great to walk round my ward with other Ward Members from other political parties, knowing we are all working hard to make our neighbourhood a better place to live in - it doesn’t matter which side you are on”*



## CHARTER 2 SUCCESS

After a detailed submission, and two in-depth assessment visits from NW Employers we heard of our Charter 2 success. The higher level Charter is demanding and evidenced based so there was a great sense of achievement amongst Members and officers.

Our success in achieving Charter 2 is down to a range of factors

- the culture of member learning in the authority which exists across all political parties. It is both high profile and valued
- senior management and political party commitment to apply for a higher level award for Member development.
- developing a programme which generated enthusiasm and commitment from a wider group of Members for a sustained period of time – being out on the streets trying to influence change.

**Chorley’s Leader, Councillor Peter Goldsworthy** is very committed to continued learning by all Councillors

*“nothing stands still, new initiatives, changes in partnership roles, changes in funding and inspection regimes means we must all commit to ongoing learning – through a whole variety of means – site visits, briefings, formal and informal training sessions, networking – it never stops”.*

## INNOVATION AND COMMUNICATION

Democratic Services work closely with the Member Support Working Group and know their customers. They know what kind of learning goes down best – getting out and about, talking to partners, making links, practical learning that helps Councillors do their job is always more popular than chalk and talk sessions – although they too have their place.

The programme was developed with local Members for local Members. The driver was not best practice from elsewhere but what would work best in Chorley – what would maintain Member enthusiasm and involvement whilst still delivering the development needed. Ward walks, traditional sessions, workshops, tours with partners and using voting handsets, proved a successful combination and attendance figures and feedback bear this out.

The NW Employers assessors for Charter 2 commented:

*“levels of participation in Member learning and development are high and have increased”*

*“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 areas and discussed how they could work together to solve those issues”*



As part of continuous member improvement, Chorley has introduced a fortnightly electronic bulletin specifically for Members called **intheknow** – bite sized updates – with links to more detail. Its an unqualified success and is now a key means of communication. Updates on neighbourhood issues and Member development opportunities are just two of the regular features.

## VALUE FOR MONEY

The programme was open to all Councillors and was delivered at minimal cost. All Councillors were involved in multiple aspects of the programme – some in all aspects. The programme was delivered using in house resources for under £2500, the major expense being transport. This represents great value for money, the value of the “on site” experience is clear from Members feedback.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUTCOMES

In the recent CAA Chorley was one of only two district Councils in the country to achieve 4/4 for Organisational Assessment (Use of Resources and Managing Performance). Member development made a key contribution.

*“Member development is strong enabling Members to effectively represent their communities interest and to provide effective challenge within the Council”*

*“Every elected Member has an up to date PDP which identifies possible training needs. Feedback from training sessions is positive, with 90%of Councillors stating that they were very satisfied with the training provided.”*      *Audit Commission*

The programme has made a difference in communities. Members influenced improvements in their ward, helped develop Neighbourhood Action Plans and worked with partners on solutions.

**The Accessing Ward Resources** session was highlighted by NW Employers

*“An understanding of the funding sources available from outside the Council – this aim was an unqualified success...most Members interviewed mentioned this training session and how they had been able to make use of it to further projects in their neighbourhood.”*

An update from the Grass Roots Grants Fund, shows that 42 projects in Chorley totalling over £150,000 were distributed between October 2008 and April 2009.

Online **Equality and Diversity training** and a dedicated equality session for Members helped the Council to achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard in 2009.

The Council's "Don't be a dirty dog" campaign was a direct result of ward walks where Members pushed for a seminar on **Dog Fouling Enforcement** and an increase in enforcement activity with a dedicated campaign in which Parish Councils had a key role with publicity. The 20 week campaign resulted in a 30% reduction in complaints about dog fouling.

Members direct involvement in neighbourhood working has meant more effective and closer working with Parish Councils and partners as well as between wards:

*"As Councillors of Chorley SW we don't feel there is great commonality between our ward and Chorley NW (eg social housing is our biggest issue and there is very little in Chorley SW). However neighbourhood funding has been allocated in our ward for Chorley Moor and our neighbourhood councillors have agreed that action - which shows great goodwill between colleagues'*

*"As a result of the Ward Walk we are doing walks ourselves with the police and housing associations as we have found it's a good way to deal with issues - we have persuaded the police to change their beat they have issued a lot of anti social behaviour orders and CCH are also now tackling the issue of difficult tenants.*

*Chorley SW Ward Councillor*



*"Working together (with councillors) to improve the neighbourhood helps the local residents to develop a sense of pride for the area in which they live, improvements are maintained and there is less anti-social behaviour"* Neighbourhood Police Officer

*"I try to do a street condition audit about every three weeks, it helps to work with the local Councillors as we can exchange information with one another"* Housing Officer

*"All (Parish Council) Members share my view that we have seen more action and engagement from Chorley Council in the last eighteen months than ever before, which is brilliant!"* Parish Council Chair

Neighbourhood working is a journey that the Council is still making but there are lots of very real differences demonstrating that Members are working very effectively in their communities – tackling issues and helping to ensure project successes. Recent survey results, show a marked increase in resident's feelings of safety both during the day and in the evening and the 2009 Place Survey showed that 30.5% of residents felt that the local Council and Police were dealing with local concerns about anti social behaviour and crime, placing Chorley in the top quartile nationally.

Finally a survey of residents in 2009, shows that the learning and development is having a positive impact on the effectiveness of Members in the eyes of the public. Satisfaction with the advice and support provided by Councillors has increased from 49.8% in 2007/8 to 67.7%.

