

Member Induction Proposals

This paper outlines proposals for the Member Induction programme for new councillors in May 2010 following local government elections.

Background

Following the Local Government elections in May 2010, it is likely that there will be a number of new councillors. It is therefore important that a robust and appropriate member induction process is put in place to ensure that councillors are able to understand the structure of the council and the support available to them in their role as a backbench councillor.

In the past councillors have shown little appetite for structured, formal training packages from member development training providers. Limited feedback from councillors suggests that they have found “on the job” practical support from officers more effective in supporting them to fulfil their role.

With this in mind, the following proposals have been developed for the member induction programme in 2010.

Proposals for induction

It is proposed that member induction takes the following format:

1. Workshops
2. Ward Walks
3. Written Materials

Workshops

It is suggested that Westminster City Council hold two or three open sessions for new members. These will be held in the fortnight following the election and some thought should be given to whether one of these sessions could be held on a Saturday morning. At each session members can attend up to three workshops each, therefore offering them an introduction to up to nine different areas of the council’s business. Suggested workshop sessions include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corporate responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neighbourhoods and area forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction from Chief Executive
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What our residents tell us – customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adult and Community Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and Young People’s Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• City Management services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• City Planning Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What you can expect from the resources team
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External speaker (issues facing local government)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to deal with housing issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to deal with casework

It has also been agreed that there will be a specific, mandatory session for members that will be given by the Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer. This session will cover the members' responsibilities to abide by the codes of conduct and governance and explain what those codes mean for members in their roles as elected councillors. This session will be open to all members and can be used as a refresher or training session for more experienced members should they consider it to be useful.

Ward walks

Given the preference for "on the job" training, new councillors may find it useful to have a ward walk organised for them. It is suggested that arrangements are made with new councillors for them to walk part of their ward with their ward champion, neighbourhood officer, officers from transportation, planning and city inspectors and city guardians. This will enable them to get a good overview of issues in their ward. Ward profiles should be provided ahead of these visits so that members are informed as to particular issues that may require attention.

Written materials

All members will also receive member induction materials which can be used as reference materials throughout the year. Using the material offered to members in 2006 as a base from which to work, officers in the Member Services team are currently writing a "Members Introduction" booklet which should be useful to all new members. Once a first draft has been completed feedback will be sought from members to ascertain whether the content is appropriate and to find out what additions can be made to make it even more useful. This booklet will contain information that will help members to go about their role as a councillor containing sections on council structure, members' allowances, the role of committees, engagements with residents, support from the council and a brief guide to the rules.

Separate documentation containing the Code of Conduct and wider Code of Governance will also be provided to both newly elected and existing members at the mandatory session with the Head of Legal Services. This will contain sections on using council resources appropriately, the code of conduct, when, how and why to update the register of interests when accepting gifts and hospitality, rights of access to information and the use of the Data Protection Act.

Prior to the election, member support officers will also pull together ward profile information for each ward. This will either form part of the "Members Introduction" booklet or be available separately to give each new member a snapshot of their ward.

Members will also receive a series of short booklets from the Local Government Information Unit and the New Councillors Information Pack from IDEA.

Conclusion

The actions outlined above should offer members the opportunity, within the first few weeks of their election, to gain a firm understanding of both their roles and the functions of the Council. However, further thought should be given to ongoing development opportunities. There are roles that backbench members have to undertake that are standard and expected but for which newly elected members will have little former experience. Scrutiny, planning and licensing are examples. It is recommended that the training which already takes place with regard to member's quasi-judicial functions before they take positions on planning and licensing committees becomes part of this induction. Given the complexity of this area, this training should however remain the responsibility of the relevant department. Following the election in May 2010, it may be worth asking new members whether they would find further training in these areas (and any others) useful. It is recommended that we discontinue any development training arrangements with external providers and commission this only on an ad hoc basis should there be sufficient interest from new members.

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