

**SUBJECT:               SUCCESSION PLANNING**

**REPORT BY:           DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES**

**LEAD OFFICER:       CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)**

## **1.     Purpose of Report**

- 1.1    As with many local authorities, the City of Lincoln Council has a significant number of experienced elected members who have considerable knowledge regarding the operation of the Council. This report summarises options for ensuring this experience is not lost to the Council in due course as its membership changes over time.

## **2.     Background**

- 2.1    Councillors have a critical role in setting the strategic direction of the Council, as well as in the decision-making process. Elected members' knowledge both of the Council and the city has a significant bearing on the operation of the Council.
- 2.2    At present the Council has no formal means by which councillors are able to pass on knowledge and skills to other elected members. Instead, there is an emphasis on member development events, political party structures, and building knowledge through personal experience.
- 2.3    Currently, a significant proportion of positions attracting a Special Responsibility Allowance are held by those members who have been councillors for the longest periods of time. While this gives the Council the benefit of those members' experience, there is value in trying to ensure that other councillors are suitably prepared to assume these roles.
- 2.4    Equally, at its last meeting the Committee noted the Council's member development programme has tended to focus upon short-term training from year-to-year, rather than developing members on an individual basis over a longer period. In seeking to address this apparent short-termism it seems apt to consider how the Council can best work to retain the knowledge it has already accrued.

## **3.     Summary of Possible Options**

### **3.1    Buddying**

At present, members are inducted to the Council by officers. This usually also involves a meeting in their first week as a councillor with senior officers, at which officers are able to meet the councillors and to explain their respective roles and responsibilities. While after this initial induction members remain able and are encouraged to contact Democratic Services or any other officers throughout their time as a councillor, elected members are very much given the freedom to work in

their own way. While there are advantages to allowing members to forge their own paths, there is the possibility that newly-elected councillors could lack the knowledge or the confidence to make the most effective use of the resources provided to them by the Council.

- 3.2 As such, consideration could be given to developing a formal 'buddying' system similar to that already in operation at some other councils. This buddying can take several forms, but will usually see a newly-elected councillor assigned to an experienced officer or councillor who can then act a first point of contact for queries about the best way for a member to carry out their role. Any such role will normally be effectively time-limited by the councillor developing the skills and knowledge they need to function independently.
- 3.3 Within this relationship it is perhaps implicit that the 'buddy' is not intended to carry out the duties of the individual councillor or to micro-manage them in their first weeks; rather the role is one of general support and guidance while a new member builds the skills and knowledge needed to act independently and effectively. While members are already likely to seek support if required, formalising a single point of contact would perhaps encourage members to raise questions which would otherwise be unaddressed and to build a relationship of trust with the identified 'buddy'.
- 3.4 Shadowing  
A variant of the buddying system geared towards building specialised knowledge in particular areas of business and general decision-making skills would be a shadowing system. This would facilitate less experienced councillors who were interested in taking on additional responsibilities developing through hands-on experience of a role. The most likely candidates to be shadowed in this way would be portfolio holders although there would also be scope for committee chairpersons to participate.
- 3.5 The purpose of such shadowing would be to develop the skills and knowledge of non-Executive members in order to provide additional long-term continuity (subject to changes in political control and direction) while it could also assist portfolio holders in carrying out their duties. The primary duties of an Assistant Portfolio Holder could include:
1. Assisting the portfolio holder in developing strategies and policies.
  2. Attending meetings and functions with the portfolio holder whenever possible and appropriate.
  3. Acting as the portfolio holder's deputy in a non-decision making capacity.
  4. Liaising with committee chairs.
  5. Developing knowledge and skills appropriate to the portfolio through training and wider research.
  6. Working alongside the portfolio holder to monitor and improve performance.
- 3.6 Members of the Executive are prohibited from being members of either the Audit Committee or any of the scrutiny committees. Assistant portfolio holders would not be automatically subject to the same restrictions although consideration should be given to the manner in which assistant portfolio holders could contribute to

discussions relating to the area with which they are assisting. Any decision-making powers would remain solely with the portfolio holder should such a scheme be adopted.

### 3.7 Long-Term Training

In addition to any buddying or shadowing schemes, the Council also needs to ensure that it provides members with the opportunity to plot their own development and have opportunities to improve their suitability for key roles, potentially on an independent basis rather than as part of a larger group.

3.8 Previously the Council has had access to events run by organisations such as the Local Government Association and Local Government East Midlands, although recent member interest has been relatively muted, possibly as a result of the time commitment required to complete the courses. Depending upon the available budget, officers will continue to offer the courses to the appropriate councillors as they become available.

3.9 The Council has also tried to implement personal development plans for councillors on a number of occasions with limited success. While the documents act as an effective framework for an initial discussion regarding long-term plans for new councillors, there have been difficulties in following up on the plans with effective outcomes. This is likely to be primarily related to pressures upon councillors' time to carry out existing duties in combination with the relatively limited tailored training that the Council can offer within existing budgets.

3.10 It should be stressed that the Council has an annual member development budget of £5,000 which covers member training as a whole, and includes both access to development opportunities for individual councillors and for training provided to councillors as a group. It is likely that any significant increase in the scope of individual training opportunities would place significant pressure upon this budget. By way of example, just one councillor studying for an MBA on an assessment-only part-time basis at the University of Lincoln would exceed the Council's annual budget in each of the years of study.

3.11 As a result of these budgetary limitations, members will need to consider whether officers should act primarily as facilitators, pointing councillors in the direction of possible development opportunities which could then be pursued at personal cost. Alternatively, additional funds will need to be found to meet the costs of personal development or training opportunities will need to be provided in-house.

3.12 Current in-house provision is often tailored around the needs of individual committees and councillors' participation in them. For example, Planning Committee training is provided for all those members who are likely to take part in planning decisions over the course of a year. If members expressed interest in a particular area of council business there is potentially scope for a relevant officer to deliver informal professional guidance aimed at developing the councillor's capacity to function in this area. While many members will already resort to officers with questions relating to the technical aspects of a service-specific enquiry, a more structured approach could see greater detail being provided to members if a councillor were able to pinpoint the type of knowledge they would like to acquire. One possible constraint in this direction would be pressure upon officer time and the practicalities of any such option would require further

consideration.

#### **4. Organisational Impacts**

##### **4.1 Finance**

There are no financial implications to this report, although members should note the potential costs associated with any extension of training opportunities to councillors.

##### **4.2 Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications to this report.

#### **5. Recommendation**

- 5.1 That members consider the proposals put forward within the report and make appropriate recommendations or suggestions as required.