

**For Discussion at the Informal meeting of the Resource Allocation Sub-Committee – 19 June 2015**

**Barriers to Standing for Common Council**

**Introduction**

1. Members have asked that consideration be given as to whether there are any barriers which deter people from standing for election to Common Council particularly as there appeared to be no shortage of candidates coming forward.
2. It was suggested that a paper looking at the factors which might influence potential candidates should be considered.

**Qualifications**

3. The qualifications for the office of Common Councilman are similar to that of local authorities with one exception, namely, that a person standing must also be a Freeman of the City of London. The granting of this for candidates (or any person on the Ward list) is a straightforward process which the City Corporation facilitates, is expedient, and for which there is no fee. Notwithstanding this some people might perceive it as an additional hurdle to undertaking their civic duties and there is a marginal reputation risk.

**Nomination**

4. Providing an individual meets the qualifying criteria he or she then needs to secure the agreement of the relevant number of nominators. In local authorities 10 signatories from electors registered in the ward are required. However, only 5 signatures need to be secured from within the ward to stand as a Common Councilman (the proposer, seconder and three assenters).

**Time Commitment**

5. The amount of time spent on civic duties largely depends on the extent to which the individual wishes to get involved and the commitments taken on i.e. the number of committees, Court meetings, committee visits and ceremonial events attended as well as whether any senior position is pursued. An elected Member's role usually includes the following:-
  - Ward representation
  - Decision-making
  - Developing and reviewing corporate policy
  - Regulatory, quasi-judicial and statutory duties
  - Community leadership and engagement

6. In addition to any Ward activities and responsibilities, the commitment to being a Common Councilman could typically be to attend the Court meetings (of which there are nine), and service on, say, two committees, totalling approximately 40 hours each year. This does not include the time required for reading, travel or visits. Attendance at civic events is a matter for the individual.

### **Timing of Meetings**

7. Members have favoured day-time meetings. Previously this was linked to the fact that due to the location of Guildhall in the City a large proportion of Members were able to fulfil both their professional and elected-representative roles during the daytime without having to compromise on one or the other. Some Members live and work in the City so there is flexibility to visit the Guildhall during the day. Those Members who do not live/work in the City, have said previously that they prefer to visit the Guildhall during the daytime for meetings rather than in the evening.
8. A survey of Members on the timing of meetings was last undertaken as part of the review of the City Corporation's governance arrangements in 2010/11. At that time the majority of the Members who responded favoured the current arrangements. Of those Members who did favour a change, there was no common view on the sort of change that would be appropriate.
9. To support Members and enable them to fulfil their role as elected representatives elsewhere in London local government, it is common practice for meetings to be scheduled during the evening, rather than during the day.
10. It is worth noting that a proportion of the Court's membership has changed since Members were last consulted. 35 new Members have joined the Court during the last 4 years, two of whom served on a previous occasion. With the three vacancies shortly to be filled, this represents approximately 30% of change.

### **Potential Financial cost of Participation**

11. As elsewhere, there is no charge to stand as a candidate for election but there is a cost associated with running an election campaign. There is a limit to how much can be spent (or reclaimed) and currently in the City this is £266 plus 5.2p per eligible elector in the ward.
12. Unlike elsewhere in local government the City Corporation does not remunerate its Members. This could be viewed as a deterrent to people standing. However Members of the Court have taken a firm view that Members' should not be paid.

13. We do not pay Members expenses, with one exception, namely, expenses for travel which are incurred when traveling from Guildhall on City Corporation business. The cost of travel from home to Guildhall is not covered. Members holding specific positions can also claim for the cost of providing hospitality. Some City Corporation activities start early and/or finish quite late e.g. visits to the Markets or formal ceremonial events. For some individuals this might require an overnight stay for which there is no cost. Potentially there is also the cost associated with the evening dress required for formal events.
14. Members are provided with IT and communication equipment to support them in their work. However, if personal equipment is used there is a mechanism for Members to be reimbursed for City Corporation business expenditure.

### **Employer Buy-in**

15. Employers are required by law to allow employees a reasonable amount of time to undertake the duties of an elected Member. However the actual amount of time given is usually dependent on the effect an absence has on an employers' business. To some extent a lack of understanding by the employer of what is involved when an employee undertakes these duties can also have an impact. This is an area that was identified by Members as one which might benefit from improvement.

### **Loss of Pay**

16. Whilst employers are required to allow employees a reasonable amount of time to undertake civic duties they are not required to pay employees for time spent away from work. To assist with this possible loss the City Corporation operates a Financial Loss Scheme which is based on the scheme operated by the Courts Service for magistrates. All Members are entitled to apply. To qualify for the City Corporation's Scheme there is an income limit of £50,000 and applicants are required to submit documentary evidence of loss.

### **Lack of Information**

17. The lack of available information about the role of councillor and expected commitment could possibly prevent an individual from standing. The Local Government Association (LGA's) has a dedicated website which encourages people to become councillors and provides them with some guidance on what is expected and what to do. Information is also available on central government's website. The City Corporation's website contains details of the qualifications required to serve as an elected Member but it does not contain information on how to go about it. For this reason a number of local authority websites also contain a direct link to the LGA's "Be a Councillor" site.

## **Childcare**

18. There is no scheme offering assistance with this.

## **Other Considerations**

19. The City has very diverse communities, both for its resident population and the workforce. The census taken in 2011 showed that 33% of the City's workforce are foreign born, 60% are male and 55% fall into an age bracket of between 25-39 years. For residents 36% are foreign born, 55% are male and 48 % fall into an age bracket between 22-45 years. Members may wish to address the question of whether they believe the Court of Common Council to be representative of all the constituent parts of the City and, if not, whether this might also act as a barrier.