

Committee:	Date:
Establishment Committee	12 May 2021
Subject: Member Remote Working and Return to Guildhall	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2 and 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Town Clerk	For Information
Report author: Angela Roach, Assistant Town Clerk and Director of Committee and Members Services	

Summary

1. The City of London Corporation has a duty of care to ensure the health and safety of its employees and its Members when conducting City Corporation business regardless of whether it is performed in the workplace or remotely. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in most employees and all Members working from home.
2. A report relating to the health and safety of City Corporation employees whilst working remotely is dealt with elsewhere on the agenda for today's meeting. Your Chair and Deputy Chair have requested that the Committee is also provided with details of any health and safety measures which have been considered in relation to Members. They were also keen for the Committee to be provided with any plans for the safe return of Members to Guildhall as the country eases out of lock down,
3. A number of measures were taken last year to assist Members in keeping safe as set out in the body of this report, these include the provision of guidance and appropriate equipment.
4. Whilst Members are able to perform their duties from home, a wholesale return to Guildhall in the next few weeks is very much dependent on the success of next steps of the Government's road map for easing the current restrictions and providing a route back to a more normal way of life.

Recommendation

5. The Committee is asked to note this report.

Main Report

Background

6. Last year's outbreak of COVID-19 together with the restrictions on gatherings and travel which followed meant that Members could no longer undertake their City Corporation duties from the building and, like a majority of the City Corporation's employees, they have had to undertake their work remotely. The City of London Corporation has a duty of care to ensure the health and safety of its employees and its Members when conducting City Corporation business regardless of whether it is performed in the workplace or at home.
7. A report relating to the health and safety of City Corporation employees is included on today's agenda. However, following a request from your Chair and Deputy Chair this report provides the Committee with the details of the health and safety measures which have been considered in relation to Members. It also provides details of the plans for Members to return to Guildhall safely as the country eases out of lock down.

Health and Safety of Members Working Remotely

8. In July last year the Chief Commoner wrote to all Members providing them with guidance on how to work from home safely. Members were provided with the following links:

[Working Safety with Display Screen Equipment \(DSE\)](#)

This related to the use DSE on a regular basis and it provided information about safe working practices when using the equipment, associated workstations and Visual Display Units.

[Laptops and other devices](#)

This covers the use of laptops and portable computing devices on a regular basis. It provided advice on the risks associated with their use and information on safe working practices when using them. Several Members were provided with additional devices, monitors and other equipment to assist with remote working activities.

[Agile and Mobile Working](#)

Agile working relates to people not working from a fixed location, at a fixed time, who have the flexibility to work from a variety of places. This link provided tips and details of the risks associated with agile and mobile working.

9. Members were also provided with a suite of [resources](#) on how to stay mentally and physically healthy during lockdown. This included information on how to access the Employee Assistance Programme (HAP). A free service giving Members around-the-clock access to articles, tips, resources and information regarding issues of a more personal nature to them and their families. Members have access to a telephone information service which includes support for stress which might be caused by legal

and financial matters as well as access to a limited confidential counselling service. This is not only available to Members but to their families also.

10. Members were also asked to complete a short survey of their working practices to provide a source of information to a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee's Members Privileges Sub-Committee as it was felt that this might be area the Sub-Committee wished to review post-pandemic in order to identify areas of possible improvements.

Return to Guildhall

11. Like officers, Members are able to perform their duties from home. A wholesale return to Guildhall is very much dependent on the success of each step of the Government's road map for easing the current restrictions on movement and gatherings which it put in place in an attempt to keep people safe whilst the pandemic continues.
12. In February Government set out a four-step road map to "ease restrictions and provide a route back to a more normal way of life". Having successfully instigated steps 1 and 2, step 3 is scheduled to come into effect from 17th May. From that date, some of the social contact rules for being outdoors will be lifted, indoor hospitality can resume providing relevant mitigation measures are in place and the number of people attending certain social gatherings such as receptions, weddings and funerals will increase to 30 people.
13. Whilst a limited number of officers have been working in Guildhall throughout the pandemic, Members have not and coming into the building has been limited to use of a temporary touch down space on the Ground floor of the North Wing, which accommodates a maximum of four people. Very few Members have used the facility preferring to operate within travel guidelines, other safety measures and undertake their City Corporation duties from home.
14. At the time of writing this report, Government advice is that we should all continue to work from home where we can. However, in line with Step 3 of the road map, the Guildhall Club will re-open its doors and be taking bookings from 17th May. It will offer a service in line with any mitigation measures deemed necessary by Government and Health and Safety advisers at the time. Other recreational services operated by the Club will remain closed for the time being.
15. As you know, despite the fact that meeting virtually has introduced more flexibility, widened the City Corporation's reach, facilitated greater public scrutiny and aided the organisation in conducting business more efficiently, Government decided not to extend provisions which would have enabled local authority meetings to continue virtually or indeed enable the City Corporation to move towards a hybrid format as had been hoped. As a result, the Court recently agreed a number of changes to the delivery of committee business. Those committees with non-local/police authority functions can now choose whether to continue to operate remotely or hold hybrid meetings with some Members attending virtually and some participating in person. A new temporary COVID decision-making process has also been put in place for committees exercising local/police authority functions until October 2021. This means that after 6th May these committees will continue to meet virtually in an informal manner. Given these

measures it is not envisaged that this will result in a wholesale return to the building as it was pre-pandemic. It is likely that only a limited number of Members will choose or need to attend in person meetings.

16. However, to assist those that do choose to come into Guildhall, the West Wing Reception will reopen from 10th May. Hand sanitisers will be available, and for track and trace purposes, it will also be equipped with a QR code stand for those with a smartphone and for those without, paper forms will be available. Instructions for travelling within this area of the building will also be in place e.g. use of the stairs and lifts.
17. The Members Reading Room and Computer Suite will also reopen from 10th May. However, as social distancing measures are still in place, the number of Members using the area will be restricted. Therefore, the temporary facility in the North Wing will remain available for use until such time as things ease and Members can return to the use of the Reading and Computer rooms in larger numbers.
18. Step 4 of the Government's road map is scheduled for 21 June. It could see the removal of the legal limits on social contact. Whilst infection rates are reducing as a result of the activities associated with the road map and the successful roll out of the vaccination programme, the requirement for the retention of limits on social contact and other PPE measures is still an unknown. It is understood that some measures may be required as coverage or the effectiveness of the vaccine is not considered to be 100% effective. A significant proportion of the population will remain vulnerable to infection. Members are therefore being encouraged to undertake a rapid flow test if they do decide to come into Guildhall. Whilst this is not mandatory it is considered the responsible thing to do. Free tests are available for Members and officers at the COVID-19 rapid testing site which has opened at 65A Basinghall Street opposite the North Wing entrance to Guildhall. Testing kits are also available free of charge at that site, from pharmacies and from other local testing sites. Kits can also be ordered online for home testing.
19. A further update will be provided to the Chair and Deputy Chair as matters progress.

Corporate and Strategic Implications

20. Policies and guidance on working remotely or from the workplace safely supports outcomes 1, 2 and 12 of the Corporate Plan i.e. they ensure that people are safe, feel safe and enjoy health and wellbeing. It also ensures that the spaces used are secure, resilient and maintained. The relaxation of the social contact rules means that Members will be able to socialise and network in person indoors for the first time in several months and this will add to the sense of wellbeing.

Equality Impact Assessment

21. Under the Equality Act 2010, all public bodies have a duty to ensure that when exercising its functions they have due regard to, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and amongst other things, to take steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people and to

encourage people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

22. The measures which have been in operation throughout the pandemic and the phased return to Guildhall will have had a positive impact on elected Members, particularly those with disabilities or health conditions who will have been more vulnerable as the pandemic continues.

Contact Officer:

Angela Roach, Assistant Town Clerk and Director of Members Services

T: 020 7332 1418

E: angela.roach@cityoflondon.gov.uk