

Committee: Policy and Resources Committee	Dated: 11 July 2024
Subject: Court of Common Council and Easter Recess 2025	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Statutory Function Brilliant Basics
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£NA
What is the source of Funding?	NA
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	NA
Report of: Town Clerk & Chief Executive	For Decision
Report author: Polly Dunn Interim Assistant Town Clerk and Executive Director of Governance and Member Services	

Summary

In March 2021, your Policy & Resources Committee introduced formalised arrangements for Christmas Recess, in line with Easter and Summer. These arrangements are implemented by the Governance and Member Services Team when scheduling committees for the year(s) ahead.

Due to the timings of the Easter weekend and the all-out elections in 2025, this report seeks a decision to vary these Recess arrangements for one year only. Options are provided.

Recommendation

Members are being asked to consider any necessary variations to the 2025 Easter Recess, and approve the preferred date to host the first Court of Common Council meeting of the 2025/2026 civic year.

Main Report

Background

- At Policy and Resources Committee on 11th March 2021, Members introduced formal Recess arrangements for Christmas, Easter and Summer. These arrangements are as follows:
 - Easter:** No committee meetings to be held during the week immediately preceding and immediately following Easter weekend
 - Summer:** No committee meetings to be held during the last week of July until the first full working week in September.

- **Christmas:** No committee meetings to be held during the week immediately leading up to the Christmas holiday period until the first full working week in January.
2. To date, restrictions around formal meetings has been implemented by the Governance and Member Services Team since 2021 without issue, with limited exceptions being made for (often statutory) circumstances such as licensing hearings.

Current Position

3. The Court of Common Council's first meeting of the civic year is, traditionally, the penultimate week of April. In 2025, this would be the 24th April. However, under current arrangements, Easter Recess would fall from Monday 14th April to Friday 25th April (inclusive).
4. Members are, therefore, required to make decide whether to vary the arrangements for the first Court meeting, or to vary the arrangements for Recess. Unfortunately, this question is further complicated by two additional factors. The first being implications of the all-out elections; with the second being an existing commercial booking in the Great Hall.
5. In 2025, the all-out Common Councillor elections are to be conducted on the 20th March. This will be preceded by a pre-election period (with restrictions on certain committee meetings) from 18th February to 20th March, inclusive.)
6. There is currently a tentative commercial booking in the Great Hall for 24th April.

Proposals

7. To address the clash of Easter Recess and April Court, it is for Members to consider the options available to them, including associated implications, and agree a preferred way forward. Therefore, set out below are the feasible options and likely implications. To assist in the inevitable discussion, Appendix 1 features a calendar for the months of February-May 2025.

A) Thursday 10th April 2025 – Not recommended

Bringing Court forward by two weeks is not feasible as it will not allow for committee vacancies to be advertised, in line with Standing Orders 25(2) and for Ward Committee appointments to be confirmed in line with Standing Order 23. It is also another event planned for this date – which limits usage of the Guildhall. Whilst this is not a viable option, it is included here for completeness.

B) Thursday 17th April 2025 – Not recommended

In relation to satisfying the Standing Orders dictating the advertisement of committee vacancies, unlike the 10th April, it is (technically) possible to host Court of Common Council on the 17th April 2025. However, the process of nominations relies on Members having email addresses and access to their accounts, which can sometimes take the best part of a fortnight to establish. Furthermore, new Members will need to be digesting a wealth of information

as part of a comprehensive induction programme. Whilst officers will do the utmost to ensure this is done seamlessly, the turn-around for seeking expressions of interest for committee will be exceptionally tight and, from experience, could lead us to errors. Beyond that, Thursday 17th April will be Maundy Thursday, a Christian religious holiday immediately preceding Good Friday. Some Members may have already made plans to be away this week, which could reduce attendance. This option will require the waiving of the first week of Recess provision for Easter.

C) Thursday 24th April in the Great Hall

Noting that Members will have already had limited committee obligations for the previous two months (due to pre-election period) they may wish to agree to waive the second week of Easter Recess for 2025 and hold the Court meeting on the 24th April. There is, however, a provisional commercial booking in the Great Hall for this day (a two day conference from 23rd-24th). Having consulted with the Remembrancer's Department, the event has not been contracted, so there are no direct financial costs associated with rescheduling the event. If the Great Hall was unavailable on the second day of the conference, the client may consider moving to an alternative venue, resulting in the loss of all revenue for that event. Reputationally, Members have recommended Guildhall for the event and dates have been noted in relevant diaries. Given the tentative commitment for this event, there is potential reputational damage should the organisation pull out at this time. However, the venue is prioritised for use by the City of London, if required. It is unlikely that the event could go ahead if Great Hall were unavailable.

D) Thursday 24th April in the Old Library

Noting the commercial booking outlined in Option C, it has been suggested that the Court meeting could be hosted in the Old Library. The City has not yet discussed with the client what the unavailability of the Old Library would mean to the event, as a whole, but it has been suggested that there is a chance that the events could run concurrently. Members may not welcome this due to the restrictions of the Old Library space (limited public gallery; new Members not in the Great Hall for their first meeting; dais space limited). It is noted that the Lord Mayor would typically be consulted on significant logistical changes such as this, it is therefore proposed that progress on this option be contingent on feedback sought from the Senior Alderman Beneath the Aldermanic Chair.

E) Hold Court on Thursday 1st May.

This date is free, but it is one week later than usual. Due to the pre-election period (18th February – 20th March) and that committees will not be established until this meeting, there will be 12 weeks of limitations on committee meetings. Ultimately, the City Corporations decision making will have been exceptionally limited during this period (although all statutory and legal obligations will be progressed). This may cause further delay to work around the organisation, but is ultimately only five working days later than usual.

F) Hold Court on a day that is not a Thursday

It would be possible to host a Court of Common Council meeting on the week commencing 21st April, but avoiding the Thursday. Tuesday 22nd and Friday

25th April have been identified with the Remembrancer's as potential options. Again, this would involve departing from the second week of the Easter Recess.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

8. This report relates to statutory functions and aligning our Brilliant Basics service provision in response to the 2025 all-out Common Councillor elections.

Financial Implications

9. There are no financial implications beyond the potential impact of moving the commercial event outlined under Option C.

Resource Implications

10. There would be considerable demand on the Governance and Member Services Team to deliver the first meeting of the civic year should Members seek to progress with hosting Court ahead of the week commencing 21st April. It will lead to work pressures likely requiring a lot of overtime across the Team, which will then require Time Off In Lieu (TOIL). If Members agree to progress with an option after the week commencing 21st April, the resource demand will be considered business as usual.

Risk Implications

11. As stated under options A and B as well as within the 'resource implications', there are risks associated with the work demand required to deliver complex Court of Common Council Agenda whilst also administering a comprehensive induction programme. These pressures may result in errors in the preparation and publication of the meeting agenda. These would be mitigated if the meeting was held after the 21st April.
12. There are reputational risks associated with pulling out of the potential event to be hosted on the 24th April.

Equality Impact Assessment and Public Sector Equality Duty

13. Under the Equality Act 2010, all public bodies have a duty to ensure that when exercising their functions due regard is given to the need to:-
 - *eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the 2010 Act;*
 - *advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and*
 - *foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;*
14. In advancing equality of opportunity public bodies also need to have due regard to the need:-

- *remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;*
- *take steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people; and*
- *encourage people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.*

15. With the introduction of protected recess periods, an assessment of the people with protected characteristics was undertaken (i.e. age, disability, gender transition, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sex orientation). The impact of formally agreeing recess was considered to be a positive impact on transparency. It is not considered that the (potential) reduction of the Easter Recess period for one year, will have an undue adverse effect on those with protected characteristics.

Climate Implications

16. None

Security Implications

17. None

Conclusion

18. In light of current restrictions on Easter Recess arrangements, and the challenges posed by the all-out elections on the timing of the 2025 April Court of Common Council meeting, Members are invited to consider the best option for scheduling.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – 2025 calendar

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APPENDIX 1: MARCH – MAY 2025

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
MARCH	17	18	19	20 Elections	21
	24 Induction Day 1	25	26 Induction Day 2	27	28
MARCH/APRIL	31	1 April	2	3	4
APRIL	7	8	9	10	11
	14	15	16	17	18 – Bank Holiday Good Friday
	21 – Bank Holiday Easter Monday	22	23	24	25
APRIL/MAY	28	29	30	1 May	2

Paired colours demonstrate possible Court meeting dates and the associated date for the agenda publication.