

Members Exit Interviews 2011

Members who retire or are not re-elected are offered an exit interview in order to provide them with the opportunity to comment on the support received during their time in office. It is also an important opportunity for a 'de-brief' and for any issues regarding the exit process to be discussed.

In 2011, 3 members stepped down and 6 were not re-elected. Of this group, 4 completed a questionnaire. Due to the response rate of less than 50%, this report provides a general summary of the themes raised.

The survey is grouped into the following sections:

- Reason for leaving (if applicable)
- Support received
- Your experience as a councillor
- Learning and development
- Representing Leeds City Council.

Reason for leaving

The majority of Members who responded to the survey were not re-elected.

Members were asked which their favourite roles on the council had been. The top 3 were:

- 1) Scrutiny Member
- 2) Whip
- 3) Member of West Yorkshire Police Authority.

Members proposed the following recommendations to people considering becoming a councillor:

- 1) Listen to experienced Members
- 2) Take up any mentoring or training and development offered
- 3) Talk to officers and get to know them. Learn what departments do.

Support received from officers

All respondents were positive about the support received from officers. One ex-Member felt that this was partly due to the positive attitude they adopted and their team-based approach to resolving issues.

Improvements to support Councillors

The following improvements to councillor support were suggested:

- Quicker responses from officers to straightforward requests
- Provide more basic help at the outset following election eg using a Dictaphone. Not making assumptions about what new Members know.

Accessibility of Council meetings

All respondents were happy with the timing of Council meetings.

Your experience as a councillor

Greatest achievement

Each member identified a different achievement:

- 1) I saved £10,000 at my first ever committee meeting by making a useful suggestion
- 2) Working with looked-after-children and being a voice for them
- 3) Involvement in the Year of the Volunteer project
- 4) Giving ward constituents confidence in my ability to solve their problems.

Changing things as a Councillor

All members felt that had managed to change things, to varying extents. Specific examples included influencing the way services are provided, helping to block key planning schemes, establishing community amenities such as noticeboards/pedestrian refuges, helping to get local road traffic issues prioritised, involvement in projects such as Year of the Volunteer, Armed Forces Day etc.

Effect on your career

Only one member commented on this. They had given up work to concentrate on their councillor role.

What the Council could have done to make the councillor experience better?

Three suggestions were proposed:

1. Retain the Members' Lounge and eatery
2. Provide better support to members who are not re-elected
3. Produce less jargon-laden documents and make better use of bullet points and executive summaries.

Training and development

All four commented positively on the training and development they received as a councillor, both in terms of quality and range offered:

"I learnt lots over the years and it helped me gain confidence"

One councillor particularly recommended the LGG Leadership Academy and Speed Reading training to other members.

Frustrations of working for the Council

The length of time needed to achieve things/bureaucracy were consistently mentioned here.

Representing the Council

All members enjoyed representing the council; two members mentioned 'helping/meeting residents' as the aspect they enjoyed the most. One enjoyed being able to know about what really goes on in the city. Two members mentioned the usefulness of attending regional/national events as a means of learning from other authorities. 'Honour' and 'pride' were mentioned here.

Recommend others to be a councillor

All four members would recommend being a Councillor of Leeds to others with the following recommendations:

- 1) Take time for yourself and look after your health
- 2) Be aware of what you're getting into and the nature of politics. Take advantage of events for potential candidates.

One respondent noted that the role is more suited to some characters than others.

Implications for consideration

A number of suggestions were made to improve the exit process for councillors:

- Help officers to better understand the election process
- Signpost members who are not re-elected to areas of support (suggestions included speaking to other ex-councillors who had been through the same experience). Also propose practical ways to celebrate achievements (eg making a book of letters and cards, sending a learning record of training undertaken, etc)
- Ensure officers do not handle the removal of Council equipment and other services insensitively.