

Guidance for Member Mentors



WLGA • CLILC



This guidance has been prepared for members intending to act as mentors for newly elected or less experienced member colleagues.

It is intended to be a short, informal, practical tool to support members who have received training, in their mentoring practice.

It is part of the support and guidance offered by the Welsh Local Government Association to authorities who are developing local strategies for member mentoring. It has been created within the context of the Welsh Strategy for Member mentoring and alongside the Model Local Authority Mentoring Strategy.

Development workshops based on this guidance are available from the Association for members on request.

We would like to thank members for their observations which have informed the guidance, and for "road testing" it. We are also grateful to officers from the Member Support Officer Network who have contributed examples from their own guidance, Carol O'Donnel from the LGIU, and the LGIU, IDeA and APSE for the tools provided from their Mentoring Handbook.

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Guidance for Member Mentors

1. What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a voluntary, confidential, one to one relationship in which an individual uses a more experienced or more senior person as a sounding board for guidance. It enables the mentee to “grow” in their role in skills, knowledge, understanding and behaviour. It can be a medium, long term or ongoing relationship. It is not a prescriptive or directive relationship but rather one which allows the mentee to find their own way, assisted by the mentor.

2. What does a mentor do?

As a mentor you will form a voluntary, confidential, one to one relationship with someone who is less experienced than yourself. This person will seek to use you, your skills, knowledge and experience as a guide and support for their personal and professional development and a sounding board for their ideas and approaches.

The agenda for your discussions will be primarily set by your mentee although you may need to guide them in clarifying their goals for what they hope to achieve from the relationship. Typically you might discuss:

- Working within the organisation: I'm new to the authority how does it all work here?
- A new role: I'm a new Scrutiny Chair, can you help me understand the role?
- Career development: Where do I go from here? How do I get there?
- Political challenges: How do I get my voice heard in the group?

The role of mentor brings with it significant responsibilities. you have a responsibility to:

- Work within a code of practice (Appendix C)
- Use a mentoring contract (Appendix B)
- Develop your mentoring skills through training

3. How do I do it?

Before working with a mentee, it is helpful to get into the appropriate frame of mind, this requires some self awareness and the ability to see how you might be perceived. Some of the attitudes you would want to have and demonstrate are:

- Respect for the mentee. Although their values or style may be different from yours you should always attempt to maintain unconditional respect for them and be non judgemental.

- Empathy. The ability to regard a situation as if you were in it, from your mentee,s point of view, this helps you to help your mentee come to their own solutions rather than yours.
- Commitment to supporting the mentee to set their own agenda and come to their own decisions/solutions. i.e. an outcome that is right for them.
- Commitment to confidentiality. To be able to guarantee that the information that you discuss goes no further than you have agreed.
- Awareness of your position as role model. You can demonstrate many of the qualities that your mentee would aspire to.

The relationship can last for as long as both parties agree that it is helpful. Either party has the ability to dissolve the relationship when it has run its natural course or if the pairs are not compatible or productive. We encourage you to arrange to review the usefulness of the relationship with your mentee regularly.

4. A framework that can help

Your mentoring sessions will be a conversation where the mentee sets the agenda and you act as a sounding board. Through actively listening to what they have to say and the skilful use of questioning and challenge you will help them to learn and develop. Mentors are also able to provide some guidance about how the local government and political context works, how to find out further information and, when appropriate, share their own experience.

To provide some structure to the sessions and make sure that the outcomes set by the mentee are reached it is helpful to have a framework to work through. You might like to use a popular widely used model - GROW.

Goals: The mentee sets out their goal/goals for the session or programme which might start out by being quite nebulous. With the help of the mentor these can be clarified so that they become clearer. You can ask:

- What do you want to achieve?
- What do you want from this meeting?
- What do you need to know about?

Reality: The current situation, including any barriers to the goals that might exist, including a reality check to see if the mentee perceives the true situation. You can ask:

- What is happening?
- Why is it a problem?
- What do you mean by that – can you give me an example?
- What have you tried - What happened?
- How do you feel about that?

Options: The mentee is encouraged to look at a variety of alternatives and evaluate them. You can ask

- What options do you think there are?
- What have you tried?
- What are the pros and cons of this?
- Is there anything else you could do?

Way forward: The mentee chooses a course of action. You can ask:

- Can you summarise what you are going to do by when?
- What obstacles and objections do you expect?
- How will you overcome them?
- Who will you get support from?
- What resources do you need?
- When should we review progress?

5. Some skills you can use

Active listening

Active listening is about immersing yourself in what someone is saying truly seeking to understand their position. It's also about giving signs that you are listening, remembering what they have said and encouraging the mentee to say more. It's not about thinking about what you can say next. Use body language to show that you are genuinely interested and paraphrase to check understanding.

Questioning

Use different questioning techniques:

- Open e.g. How do you feel about what happened?
- Closed e.g. Do you think that's true?
- Leading e.g. So were you thinking about setting up a meeting with x?
- Hypothetical e.g. What might happen if you were to do that?
- Analytical/ challenging e.g. What caused you act in that way? What do you think the effect on x was as a result of your actions?

Bear in mind that "why" is a fairly challenging question. 'What caused you to' is less threatening than 'why did you do that'

Giving feedback

Give feedback when invited but always be supportive and constructive and wherever possible positive. Helpful feedback is:

- Clear - everyone knows what the message is

- Owned – it's your own perception and not objective truth
- Balanced – contains both positive and negative
- Evidence based – can be backed up

You should encourage your mentee to give feedback to you in this style on the mentoring relationship.

6. Some Tools you can use

The following are a set of widely used tools or models that you can *offer* to your mentee to help them examine an issue or situation in a structured way. Remember that some people like to use tools and others don't!

The tools are sourced from the LGIU, IDeA and APSE Mentors Handbook by Carol O'Donnell at the LGIU.

Learning from Mistakes - Analysis

What happened: a description of the issue or problem
When did it happen?
What/who was involved?
Why did it go wrong?
What have I learnt from this?

Learning from mistakes – changes

What changes do I need to make?
How will I make the changes?
When will I make these changes?
When will I review progress?

LGIU, IDeA, APSE.

Visioning

Visioning exercises are used as a means of defining and achieving a desirable future action. Studies have shown that we are more likely to reach an objective if we can see it and imagine the steps to reach it.

What would/could the end result look like? (Try to describe it as clearly and specifically as possible)

How would/could you get there?

Would/could it carry credibility? (Try to consider all the people likely to be involved. How credible is this to them?)

What would/could happen if this course of action were not pursued? (Try to think in terms of the 'worst case scenario' as well as any others)

By assessing the risk in this way not only do you build up a picture of the possible outcomes; you can also develop contingency plans to protect yourself against the 'worst case scenario'

LGIU, IDeA, APSE

Cost Benefit Analysis

This process can be used with an individual to examine the advantages and disadvantages that might accumulate from taking various courses of action. It encourages the individual to step back and assess them against the cost or investment required to achieve the benefits. It can also help clarify the disadvantages of taking a particular course of action and highlight the risk factors.

Action	Benefits	Disadvantages	Cost (Money, people, time, etc.)
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

7. What happens if I need help?

Inevitably as a mentor you will find yourself in need of some support. If the relationship is deteriorating you might need to talk to someone about why this might be and what you could do about it. You might find yourself being asked questions which you are unsure how to answer or are unclear where to signpost your mentee.

For this reason it's helpful to have someone with whom you can "check out" the more challenging aspects of the mentoring relationship. You might find it helpful to identify for yourself a "mentors mentor" who is prepared to be bound by the same confidentiality contract as yourself and can offer you support when you need it.

8. Guidance for Mentees

Mentors will find it helpful to provide a copy of the guidance attached at Appendix A to their mentee.

9. The Mentoring Contract between Mentor and Mentee

These issues (Appendix B) should be discussed at the beginning of the relationship and both parties should agree to abide by the resulting decisions.

10. Code of Practice for Member Mentors

Before undertaking work with a mentee, the mentor will agree to act within a code of practice (attached at Appendix C)

It is essential that mentors abide by this code. This guarantees a high quality of support for the mentee provided by a mentor who works within an appropriate professional framework guaranteeing confidentiality and engendering the trust necessary for the relationship to work.

Appendix A

Guidance for Mentees

Mentors will find it helpful to provide a copy of the following guidance to their mentee

What can a mentee expect?

As a mentee, you will form a voluntary, confidential, one to one relationship with a person who is more senior/experienced than yourself. You can use this person, their skills, knowledge and experience as a guide and support for your own personal and professional development and as a sounding board for your own ideas and approaches.

You will set the agenda for your discussions. Typically you might discuss:

- Working within the organisation: I'm new to the authority how does it all work here?
- A new role: I'm a new Scrutiny Chair can you help me understand the role?
- Career development: Where do I go from here? How do I get there?
- Political challenges: How do I get my voice heard in the group?

The relationship can last for as long as both parties agree that it is helpful. Either party has the ability to dissolve the relationship when it has run its natural course or if the pairs are not compatible or productive. We encourage you to arrange to review the usefulness of the relationship with your mentor regularly

How to be a good mentee

As a mentee you have a responsibility to:

- Agree to maintain appropriate confidentiality
- Take responsibility for your own learning
- Work within the mentoring contract agreed with your mentor

Your relationship with your mentor will be most productive if you are

- Proactive in identifying your aims for the relationship
- Prepared to take responsibility for yourself and the outcomes you want
- Receptive to what the mentor has to say
- Prepared to be honest, open and trust what the mentor shares with you
- Able to feedback to your mentor regularly on how you think the relationship is working out
- Willing to end the relationship if its is not working or you no longer need the support

If you have a problem with the arrangement that cannot be resolved with your mentor, you might want to approach the people who have helped broker the relationship for support.

Appendix B

The Mentoring Contract between Mentor and Mentee

These issues should be discussed at the beginning of the relationship and both parties should agree to abide by the resulting decisions.

1. Time and place

- Both parties agree how much time they are able to give including work between meetings if necessary
- Frequency of meetings
- Duration of relationship (how long before a review)
- Venues - away from the usual working environment, private, out of reach of phones and colleagues

2. Scope/context

- What will be covered?
- What might some of the learning goals, short and long term be?
- The mentee sets the agenda

3. Relationships and Responsibilities

- The Mentor has a responsibility to act within a code of practice (see appendix c)
- The meetings are a priority - once set shouldn't be altered if avoidable
- The mentee is responsible for their learning and actions
- There is a responsibility on both sides for honesty and trust
- Both parties need to take responsibility for suggesting the ending of the relationship when appropriate

4. Confidentiality

- Agreement on confidentiality or where any information goes
- Should notes be made? What happens to any notes during and after the arrangement?
- Will there be any discussions with the mentors mentor/sponsors/ peers?

Appendix C

Code of Practice for Member Mentors

Before undertaking work with a mentee the mentor will agree to act within this code of practice.

Throughout the relationship and after it has been concluded, the mentor will:

1. Competence

- undertake training in mentoring
- agree to work only within their level of competence
- understand and agree to work within this code
- seek personal support when necessary from an appropriate mentors mentor

2. Context

- agree to understand and operate within the political/organisational context where the relationship is taking place
- seek to meet the learning and development needs of the mentee

3. Boundaries

- agree to work within the boundaries of the mentoring relationship, i.e work/professional development/performance, not straying into areas where they are not qualified/experienced such as counselling or psychotherapy or into an inappropriate personal relationship
- be prepared to refer the mentee to other sources of information/expertise or professional assistance as appropriate

4. Confidentiality

- maintain a level of confidentiality agreed with the mentee both during and after the relationship has ended
- disclose information only when agreed with the mentee unless the mentor believes that there is convincing evidence of serious danger to the mentee or others if the information is withheld

5. Integrity and professionalism

- act within appropriate law/policy/values of the authority e.g. equal opportunities and HR policies
- consider the learning and development needs of the mentee as brought to the relationship as paramount
- seek to understand the needs and point of view of the mentee maintaining respect for the mentee throughout the relationship
- not exploit the mentee in any way or put their own interests before that of the mentee

I the undersigned agree to work with my mentee in accordance with the above Code of Practice
