

Committee(s): Member Development and Standards Sub-Committee	Date: 24/10/2024
Subject: Member/Member Buddying Scheme	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	All
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 Decision
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Summary

A range of activities are already well underway to support the delivery of the Member Induction Programme in 2025, including compilation of new Members' Portal pages and finalisation of a programme of high-level and deep-dive briefings that will be made available to all Members.

This report sets out more detailed proposals on plans for a Member-on-Member buddying scheme which, at the suggestion of your Sub-Committee, is to be introduced for the first time as part of the 2025 Member Induction offering.

Recommendation

The Sub-Committee is asked to note proposals for the introduction of a Member/Member buddying scheme as part of the 2025 Induction Plan. Members are invited to comment on these proposals and offer their views in respect of the proposed timetable for and selection of Member buddies as well as the Guidance to be issued to all parties.

Main Report

Background

1. The City Corporation's 'all out' Ward elections (in contested wards) will take place on 20th March 2025, and it is proposed that a comprehensive Induction and Refresher programme be offered to all Common Councillors in the quarter immediately following this, up until Summer Recess 2025 (April – July 2025).
2. The induction programme that followed the 2022 Ward elections was very well received by the 38 newly elected Members welcomed at that time. Due to the positive feedback received by the Town Clerk and the level of Member engagement in the programme after March 2022, by both new and returning

Members, the 2025 induction programme intends to follow a broadly similar format, albeit with more considered and curated approach in terms of scheduling. We are, however, seeking to further consider the areas of activity that Members found most useful.

3. In addition to the formal Induction offer of briefings and visits, all newly elected Members will receive ongoing practical and pastoral support from the Governance and Member Services Team, the Remembrancer's Department, the Chief Commoner, Aldermen and relevant Ward Deputies but also, subject to your approval, they will have access to a wider pool of Member "buddies" for the first time.
4. The introduction of a scheme whereby returning Members may volunteer to act as buddies for newly elected Members was a suggestion put forward by your Sub-Committee during discussions earlier in the year on Induction Plans for 2025. This notion was further explored with the full Court at their last Informal gathering where broad support for this was indicated. The view expressed by the majority of Members was that this should not, however, be over formalised or prescribed.
5. Typically, as senior (longstanding) Members often hold positions such as Ward Deputy, Chief Commoner and Alderman, it was thought that a buddy scheme (which would be open to all returning Members) could be a great way to take advantage of the experiences of newer Members, who would have gone through this process more recently and will be uniquely positioned to highlight key "things that they wished they had been told sooner".

Proposals for Scheme Introduction

6. The buddying scheme is not intended to replace the direct contact and access all Members can expect when they wish to speak to the Chief Executive, Directors of Services, members of the Governance and Member Services Team or indeed their own Alderman or Alderwoman, Deputies and other Ward colleagues. Conversely, it is hoped that this new system will complement these more formal and well-established structures already in place. Buddies will, instead, be available to offer support and advice on a more informal basis, especially during the first year of a new Member's term of office, to help ease them into their new roles.
7. The current proposal is that the Town Clerk, on behalf of the Chief Commoner, will contact all existing Members before the end of this calendar year and seek any expressions of interest from amongst those intending to re-stand at election to serve as a buddy. Interested Members would be asked to submit a statement of no more than 300 words outlining their relevant qualities/expertise so that these might be considered by the Chief Commoner and Deputy Chair of this Sub-Committee, in consultation with the Assistant Town Clerk, who would be tasked with selecting Members to serve in this capacity (subject, of course, to their re-election). Statements should include reference to things such as Committee service history and any past Charing experience for example.

8. Those selected as buddies would be contacted in early 2025 and asked that they make themselves available around the two initial induction days diarised for new Members such that they may network here and offer face-to-face introductions. They would also be provided with copies of the Buddying Scheme Guidance document, a draft of which is appended here for comment, so that expectations upon all parties are clearly set out and understood from the outset.
9. Conscious of the need to avoid over formalising the process, rather than buddy matches being made by Officers, the intention would be to share the contact and 'biographical' details of those selected to serve as buddies as part of the new Member induction material. This would create a 'pool' of buddies for new Members to reach out to for advice. The Members' Portal pages will also contain buddy contact details as well as a short piece detailing each Members' specific committee/chairing/wider experience to date so that new Members will be best placed to decide where contacts may most helpfully be established. This may, of course, mean that contact is established with more than one of the buddies in the pool dependent upon specific queries at any given time.
10. Details of returning Members will not, where Wards are contested, be known until 20th March and so any contact details of those selected to form the pool of buddies would not 'go live' or be shared with newly elected Members until early the following week.
11. Members' views are now invited as to the proposed approach to the introduction of a new buddying scheme and the draft Guidance document intended for both parties attached at **Appendix 1** so that these proposals can be further developed and expressions of interest can be sought from those intending to re-stand for election ahead of your next scheduled meeting in January 2025.
12. In drawing this work together, officers reached out to other authorities and, of the limited number that replied, identified that similar schemes do not currently exist. The draft guidance is, therefore, an interpretation of what Members have expressed in the aforementioned fora.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

11. Ensuring that we have a comprehensive, 'fit-for-purpose' Member Induction and longer-term Member Development Programme promotes high standards of corporate governance throughout the organisation and demonstrates support and democratic services which meet the needs of our elected Members and electorate.

Financial Implications

12. None.

Resource Implications

13. Beyond the initial development of the scheme, advertisement and selection, there are no further ongoing resource implications that have been immediately identified as a result of this specific scheme.

Legal Implications

14. Members are asked to note the City Corporation's duty, under the Localism Act 2011, to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted Members. If introduced, it is hoped that this scheme will help support the formal Standards framework.

Risk Implications

15. The success of the Member Learning and Development Programme is reliant on the level of Member engagement. If the offer is not sufficiently appropriate or engaging, objectives will not be met. If successful, the delivery of the Strategy ought to help mitigate against corporate risks across the organisation, with Members being better equipped to discharge their various responsibilities.
16. Member conduct represents a potential reputational risk to the organisation, together with a practical risk associated with a failure to attract and retain high quality Members and Officers should there be a negative working environment. It is, therefore, in the interests of the Corporation to take such steps as are required to foster a positive and inclusive working environment for its Members and Officers.

Equalities Implications

16. Public bodies have a duty under the Equality Act to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The proposals contained in this report do not have any potential negative impact on a particular group of people based on their protected characteristics, rather they seek to actively foster good relations between and equality of opportunity for all. Officers will ensure that the Induction/Refresher offering is accessible to all Members and would accommodate those requiring additional support to enable all delegates to have the same opportunities. Wherever possible, reasonable adjustments will be made to allow equality of access.

Climate Implications:

17. There are no climate implications arising from this report.

Security Implications:

18. There are no security implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

19. The Member-led learning and development programme remains an important aspect of the organisation's Member Services offer to each of its elected Members. We are continuing to strive to ensure that Members view the programme as their resource, tailored to their needs and to give them access to the skills, knowledge, and expertise with which to conduct their role as a representative for those who live and work in the City.
20. In advance of the Ward elections on 20th March 2025, the priority is to develop and deliver an engaging, accessible, and useful Member Induction Programme which will be delivered as of 24th March 2025. The wider programme should also provide opportunities for returning Members to further develop, enhance and share their skills, knowledge, and experience about how the organisation works and their role as elected Members in developing and delivering corporate priorities in increasingly challenging and changing circumstances. The Sub-Committee is therefore asked to note the contents of this report. Members are invited to comment on the proposals and offer their views in respect of the draft Guidance document and proposed timetable and focus for the introduction of a Member buddying scheme such that expressions of interest from those Members intending to re-stand can be sought and considered before the end of this calendar year.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Draft Member 'Buddying' Scheme Guidance – March 2025

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