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| <b>Committee(s):</b><br>Member Development and Standards Sub-Committee                                    | <b>Date:</b><br>07/02/2025 |
| <b>Subject:</b><br>Member/Member Buddying Scheme  | <b>Public</b>              |
| <b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b> | <b>All</b>                 |
| <b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>                                  | <b>N</b>                   |
| <b>If so how much?</b>  | <b>N/A</b>                 |
| <b>What is the source of funding?</b>   | <b>N/A</b>                 |
| <b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department</b>                              | <b>N/A</b>                 |
| <b>Report of:</b> Town Clerk  | <b>For Decision</b>        |
| <b>Report author(s):</b> Gemma Stokley  |                            |

### **Summary**

At its last meeting in October 2024, your Sub-Committee considered and approved more detailed proposals on plans for a Member-on-Member buddying scheme which is to be introduced for the first time as part of the 2025 Member Induction offering. In doing so, the Sub-Committee approved the proposed timetable and process by which Members would be selected to serve as buddies.

The call for expressions of interest from across the full Court of Common Council and subsequent selection process has now concluded and this report therefore presents further details on this as well as further clarification as to how the new scheme will work in practice alongside some guiding principles.

### **Recommendation**

The Sub-Committee is now asked to note the outcome of the selection process for identifying Member buddies as well as further proposals as to the introduction of a Member/Member buddying scheme as part of the 2025 Induction Plan. Members are invited to provide final comment on these proposals and offer their views in respect of the proposed 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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. 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, following approval

from this Sub-Committee, they will have access to a wider pool of Member “buddies” for the first time.

3. 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 an 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.
4. 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 an effective 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”.
5. 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.

#### **Current Position – update since the last meeting**

6. Following this Sub-Committee’s approval of the proposed timetable and selection process, the Town Clerk, on behalf of the Chief Commoner, contacted all existing Members ahead of the pre-Christmas recess period to seek any expressions of interest from amongst those intending to re-stand at election. Interested Members were 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. Members were advised that statements should include reference to things such as Committee service history and any past Chairing experience. A copy of the Buddying Scheme Guidance document approved by this Sub-Committee was also appended so that expectations upon all parties are clearly set out and understood from the outset. It was also highlighted that those applying should seek to 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.
7. A total of 13 applications, accompanied by supporting statements, were received from a mixture of newer and longer serving members, from Common Councillors and also an Alderman.
8. Having reviewed the statements in consultation with the Assistant Town Clerk, the Chief Commoner and your Deputy Chairman are now minded to recommend that all 14 applicants be informed that they have been selected to form part of the buddy

pool. Based upon previous member turnover figures from both 2018 and 2022, a pool of this size would seem sufficient to ensure that no one member is overwhelmed by buddy requests at any given time (subject of course to the re-election of the interested parties).

9. In this vein, the feasibility and success of this proposed buddy scheme is clearly dependent upon the number of those who are seeking to serve being successfully re-elected. Based on the wider feedback received from those putting themselves forward and our best possible estimates around Member turnover, Officers would propose that should there be fewer than 10 returned to form the pool, the launch of the scheme be reconsidered.

10. Those who have come forward and the Chair and Deputy Chair would now like to recommend the appointment of are as follows:

- Ian Bishop-Laggett
- Deputy Keith Bottomley
- Tijs Broeke
- Deputy Henry Colthurst
- Anne Corbett
- Deputy Peter Dunphy
- Alderman Alison Gowman
- Deputy Caroline Haines
- Deputy Ann Holmes
- Deputy Shravan Joshi
- Deputy Paul Martinelli
- Deputy Giles Shilson
- Naresh Sonpar
- Deputy James Thomson

11. Conscious of the need to avoid over formalising the process (in line with the views expressed by the wider Court) rather than buddy 'matches' being made or suggested 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. 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, when and with whom contact 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. Others may wish to establish a more regular meeting pattern/mentor-style approach with their chosen buddy subject, of course, to availability.

12. With regard to buddy availability, the Governance and Members Services Team, in signposting the scheme, will seek to manage expectations around this and suggest that, if new Members fail to receive a response they seek to reach out elsewhere. It might also be useful to stipulate a suggested response rate that is in line with that detailed within the Member/Officer Charter and this could, should Members feel it helpful, be clearly articulated within the Guidance document appended. The Member/Officer Charter states that Members should receive an

acknowledgement as soon as possible, but in any event within 2 working days, and a full response as soon as possible thereafter, within 10 working days of receipt of the request

13. Details of returning Members will not, where Wards are contested, be known until 20<sup>th</sup> 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. Member buddies will also be invited to join the new Member Induction Days in order to meet new Members face to face.
14. Members' final views are now invited as to the proposed approach to the introduction of and the parameters to be communicated around a new buddying scheme as well as the suggested draft Guidance document intended for both parties attached at **Appendix 1** so that applicants may be informed of the selection process outcome and final preparations for and communications around the scheme launch may be progressed.
15. It is worth re-iterating that, 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**

16. 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**

17. None.

### **Resource Implications**

18. 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**

19. 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**

20. 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.

21. 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**

22. 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:**

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

### **Security Implications:**

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

### **Conclusion**

25. 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.
26. In advance of the Ward elections on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025, the priority is to develop and deliver an engaging, accessible, and useful Member Induction Programme which will be delivered as of 24<sup>th</sup> 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 and Members are invited to comment on the final proposals around the scheme launch and offer views in respect of the draft Guidance document.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Draft Member ‘Buddying’ Scheme Guidance – March 2025

### **Gemma Stokley**

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