Committee(s): Member Development & Standards Sub-Committee – For Decision	**Date:** 11 June 2026
Subject: Proposal for a Committee Buddy Scheme for New Committee Members	**Public report:** For Decision
This proposal: • **delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes** • **provides business enabling functions**	• Diverse Engaged Communities • Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
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?	No
Report of:	Deputy Town Clerk
Report author:	Isaac Thomas

Summary

This report proposes the introduction of a Committee Buddy Scheme intended to support Members who are newly appointed to Committees and Sub-Committees during the course of a civic year.

This proposal has emerged from feedback gathered by the Chief Commoner during discussions with newer Members approximately one year into their term of office. Members highlighted that joining Committees after work programmes and discussions are already underway can make it challenging to fully understand the context of ongoing issues and existing priorities, as well as established working practices. It was also recognised that Members may feel reluctant to ask basic or procedural questions in formal committee settings, given pressures on time within meetings.

The proposed 'Committee Buddy Scheme' would seek to provide new Committee Members with informal peer support from an experienced Member perspective, in addition to the existing officer support from Committee Clerks, Chief Officers and relevant departmental officers. This report sets out several potential delivery models, which include the designation of a Committee Buddy by each Committee, the option for Chair or Deputy Chair to undertake the role directly, or the Chair nominating an existing Member to fulfil the role with support from the Committee Clerk.

This proposal also reflects upon the lessons learned from the wider Member/Member Buddying Scheme introduced as part of the 2025 Induction Programme and seeks to

develop a more targeted and proportionate approach focused specifically on Committee integration and understanding.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Note the contents of this report.
2. Approve, in principle, the introduction of a Committee Buddy Scheme for Members newly appointed to Committees and Sub-Committees.
3. Endorse the principle that the Chair, Deputy Chair, or a Member nominated by the Chair should undertake the Committee Buddy role, supported by the Committee Clerk.
4. Agree that the Town Clerk develop further operational guidance and implementation proposals for future consideration by this Sub-Committee.

Main Report

Background

1. In the build up to the all-out Ward elections in March 2025, this Sub-Committee considered and approved proposals relating to the introduction of a wider Member/Member Buddying Scheme as part of the 2025 Member Induction Programme.

2. The scheme was intended to provide newly elected Members with informal support, advice, and signposting from returning Members alongside the formal support already provided by officers, Ward colleagues, Aldermen, and the wider Member Services offer.

3. At its meeting on 8 July 2025, Members of this Sub-Committee undertook to review the 2025 Member Induction Programme, which provided the opportunity for Members to reflect upon the operation of the Member/Member buddying scheme.

4. Members agreed that, whilst the scheme had been worthwhile in principle, it had proven resource intensive and difficult to monitor in practice. It was also noted that many new Members had continued to seek support organically through existing Member relationships and the wider Court, rather than from the list of designated Member buddies.

5. During separate discussions convened by the Chief Commoner with newer Members approximately one year into their term of office, feedback was received regarding the challenges associated with joining Committees partway through ongoing work streams.

6. Members highlighted that Committee discussions often proceed on the assumption that all participants already understand the context and history of matters under consideration, which can create difficulties for newly appointed Members seeking to contribute effectively. It was also noted that newer Members

may hesitate to ask questions in formal Committee settings due to concerns about appearing inexperienced, which may in turn limit their confidence and ability to contribute fully to discussions

7. It was suggested that a more focused “Committee Buddy” approach may therefore assist Members in understanding ongoing issues, committee culture, procedures and priorities from an existing Member perspective alongside the provision of officer-led inductions and support.

Current Position

8. At present, new Committee Members receive support from Committee Clerks and officers through various means of engagement, including briefings and email updates; however, these can vary in quality or consistency depending on the complexity of the issue(s) and scope of the committee, as well as the experience of the Clerk and supporting Officers with the subject material.

9. Whilst these arrangements provide procedural and technical support, it has been recognised that there may be value in introducing an additional informal Member-led mechanism to assist new Committee Members in understanding:

   • ongoing or ‘live’ issues before Committees;

   • committee working practices and culture;

   • background and context behind current discussions; and

   • informal practical advice from a Member perspective.

10. It has also been recognised that some Members may feel reluctant to ask questions in formal settings where they feel they may be expected already to understand matters under discussion.

11. The proposed Committee Buddy Scheme would seek to address elements of this through an informal peer-support arrangement.

Options

12. Members are invited to discuss the below options for delivery, noting that, under all of these options, officer support would remain an important component of the wider support framework.

<u>Option 1 – Committee-nominated Buddy</u>

Each Committee or Sub-Committee could formally nominate a designated Member Buddy.

This option would provide clarity and consistency but might also introduce additional administrative and governance processes, particularly given the number of Committees and Sub-Committees across the organisation. To reduce this burden, it could be limited in scope to Grand Committees only, although it is worth noting that newly appointed Members of Sub-Committees might similarly benefit from buddy support.

Option 2 – Chair or Deputy Chair-led Buddying Role

The Chair or Deputy Chair could undertake the Committee Buddy function as part of their broader leadership responsibilities, consistent with the job description for Committee Chairs.

This option would align naturally with existing roles and responsibilities of Chairs and may provide a more streamlined approach.

Option 3 – Chair-nominated Member Buddy

The Chair could nominate an existing Committee Member to undertake the role, supported by the Committee Clerk. This slightly more informal option would provide flexibility whilst still enabling Committees to identify individuals best placed to support new Members. This approach is considered to provide sufficient flexibility whilst avoiding the creation of additional formal appointment processes or unnecessary administrative burdens. Feedback from the Member/Member Buddying Scheme suggested that Members would benefit from a less formalised approach.

Option 4 – A hybrid approach of Options 2 and 3 (recommended)

Giving Chairs the discretion to decide whether to do this themselves, or nominate a more appropriate (and willing) individual, would seem to represent the most effective option.

Option 5 – Retain current arrangements (do nothing)

No formal buddying arrangement would be introduced, with support continuing to be provided through existing channels (Committee Clerks and officers). This option would avoid any additional administrative burden but may not address the identified need for more structured peer support for Members.

Proposals

13. This paper invites Members to consider the utility of a Committee Buddy Scheme to support Members newly appointed to Committees and Sub-Committees.

14. The purpose of the scheme would be to:

- help new Members understand ongoing Committee business and priorities;
- provide informal peer support and signposting;
- encourage earlier and more confident participation in Committee discussions; and
- complement existing officer-led induction and governance support arrangements.

15. The Committee Buddy role would be intended to operate informally and would not replace the formal responsibilities of officers or Member Services.

16. Subject to Member views, officers would develop light-touch guidance setting out:

- the purpose of the role;
- suggested expectations and boundaries;
- interaction with officer support arrangements; and
- suggested approaches to supporting new Committee Members.

17. Consideration would also be given to whether the scheme should apply to all Committees and Sub-Committees or whether a more targeted approach would be appropriate.

Key Data

18. Feedback from newer Members indicates that joining Committees during an ongoing term can create challenges in understanding the context of ongoing work and discussions.

19. The 'Review of the 2025 Member Induction Programme,' which was conducted by this Sub-Committee following the induction programme in 2025, identified both the value of informal Member support arrangements and the need for sustainable approaches that avoid unnecessary administrative burden.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- **Strategic implications –** The proposal supports the Corporate Plan 2024–2029 objective of Diverse Engaged Communities by supporting inclusion, participation, and engagement amongst Members. The proposal also supports Providing Excellent Services through strengthening Member support arrangements and encouraging effective governance and decision-making.
- **Financial implications -** There are no direct financial implications arising from this proposal at this stage.
- **Resource implications –** Depending on what this Sub-Committee agrees, limited officer support would be required from Committee Clerks and Governance staff in facilitating and supporting the scheme.
- **Legal implications –** No legal implications have been identified at this stage.
- **Risk implications –** No risk implications have been identified at this stage.
- **Equalities implications –** The proposal may positively support equality of participation by helping newer Members feel more confident and informed in Committee settings.
- **Climate implications -** No climate implications have been identified at this stage.
- **Security implications -** No security implications have been identified at this stage.

Conclusion

20. This report proposes the introduction of a Committee Buddy Scheme intended to support Members joining Committees and Sub-Committees during an ongoing term of office.

21. The proposal seeks to build upon feedback received from newer Members and lessons learned from the wider 2025 Member/Member Buddying Scheme by introducing a more focused approach to Committee integration and support.

22. Members are therefore invited to consider and endorse the proposals set out within this report, specifically through Option 4 set out above.

Background Papers

- Member/Member Buddying Scheme Report – Member Development & Standards Sub-Committee – 7 February 2025 (Agenda Item 7)
- Review of the 2025 Member Induction Programme – Member Development & Standards Sub-Committee – 8 July 2025

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