MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND STANDARDS SUB COMMITTEE
Thursday, 11 June 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the Member Development and Standards Sub Committee held at COMMITTEE ROOM - 2ND FLOOR WEST WING, GUILDHALL on Thursday, 11 June 2026 at 2.00 pm

Present

Members:
Philip Woodhouse (Chairman)
Deputy Jaspreet Hodgson (Deputy Chair)
Susan Farrington
Deputy Helen Fentimen OBE JP
Sandra Jenner
Charles Edward Lord, OBE JP
Deputy Deborah Oliver
Naresh Hari Sonpar

In attendance:
Charles Edward Lord
Benjamin Murphy

Officers:

Michael Cogher	-	Comptroller & City Solicitor
Gregory Moore	-	Deputy Town Clerk
Polly Dunn	-	Assistant Town Clerk
Gemma Stokley	-	Principal Governance & Member Services Manager
Isaac Thomas	-	Town Clerk's Department

1. **APOLOGIES**
Apologies were received from Deputy Henry Pollard, Deputy Caroline Haines, Deputy James Thomson, Deputy Christopher Hayward and Alderman Sir Andrew Charles Parmley. Deputy Henry Pollard and Deputy Caroline Haines joined the meeting virtually.

2. **MEMBER'S DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**
No declarations were received.

3. **ELECTION OF A DEPUTY CHAIR**
The Committee proceeded to elect a Deputy Chair in accordance with Standing Order 29.

Deputy Jaspreet Hodgson, as the only Member expressing their willingness to serve, was duly elected as Deputy Chairman for the year ensuing.

RESOLVED, that - Deputy Jaspreet Hodgson be elected Deputy Chairman of the Member Development & Standards Sub-Committee for the year ensuing.

4. **PUBLIC MINUTES**

The Sub-Committee considered the public minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2026. A Member queried the circulation of an organisational chart that had been referenced within the minutes. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that this would be made available to Members via the Members' Portal in due course.

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2026 be approved as a correct record.

5. **PROPOSAL FOR A COMMITTEE BUDDY SCHEME FOR NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk concerning a proposal to introduce a Committee Buddy Scheme for newly appointed Members to Committees and Sub-Committees.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that feedback from newer Members had highlighted the challenges of joining Committees partway through ongoing work programmes, particularly where prior knowledge of issues was assumed. Turnover among Committee Clerks had also reduced the consistency of support that had previously been available, reinforcing the need for additional mechanisms to assist new Members in becoming familiar with Committee business. It was noted that the proposed scheme intended to provide a light-touch, informal mechanism for new Members to access support, through either the Chair or a nominated Member acting as a point of contact.

Members emphasised the importance of ensuring consistency in the approach adopted across Committees, whilst maintaining flexibility and avoiding an overly rigid or bureaucratic approach. It was suggested by a Member that the scheme should operate as a supplementary and optional support mechanism, rather than replacing existing support arrangements. Members agreed that the scheme should provide clear guidance but also retain flexibility for Committees to adapt arrangements to their specific circumstances.

A Member also raised the role of Ward Deputies, suggesting that they could provide a complementary source of support where they sit on the relevant Committees.

Members also reflected on the importance of retaining existing Committee briefing arrangements at the start of each municipal year and agreed that the proposed scheme should operate alongside these established practices.

Concerns were also expressed about the potential for undue influence where a buddy might present personal views rather than objective information to new Committee Members. Officers advised that a degree common sense would be required to mitigate this risk and new Committee Members were encouraged to draw on the multiple sources of information available, including Chairmen, committee clerks and buddies.

It was also observed that the potential provision of CoPilot licenses, due to be discussed at Item 6, might complement the proposed buddying scheme by supporting Members further in digesting Committee reports.

The Sub-Committee supported a flexible approach, whereby the Chair would have discretion to act as the buddy or nominate another appropriate Member and agreed that this should be taken forward as an additional support mechanism for new Members. The Deputy Town Clerk undertook to develop further operational guidance and implementation proposals for future consideration by the Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED, that Members:

- Noted the report.
- Approved, in principle, the introduction of a Committee Buddy Scheme for Members newly appointed to Committees and Sub-Committees.
- Endorsed 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.
- Agreed that the Town Clerk develop further operational guidance and implementation proposals for future consideration by this Sub-Committee.

6. **PROPOSAL FOR A MICROSOFT COPILOT PILOT SCHEME FOR MEMBERS**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk concerning a proposal for a Microsoft Copilot Pilot Scheme for Members.

The Deputy Town Clerk introduced the report, advising that the proposal had emerged from feedback from newer Members regarding the accessibility and digestibility of Committee reports. It was noted that, whilst work was ongoing to improve report writing standards, there remained an opportunity to explore the use of artificial intelligence tools to support Members in reviewing and understanding Committee papers. While Members already had access to the basic version of Microsoft Copilot known as ‘CoPilot Chat’, the proposal sought to test enhanced functionality through a controlled pilot of Copilot Premium.

Members acknowledged the value of testing the enhanced functionality provided by CoPilot Premium and noted that a pilot scheme would enable the organisation to assess user experience, to identify benefits and limitations, and develop lessons learned before any wider rollout to the full Court membership. Members emphasised the importance of establishing clear evaluation criteria, including how the tool was used, the quality of outputs generated, and the time commitment required from participants. Members also highlighted the importance of making those taking part in the trial aware of the time commitment required.

Several Members highlighted the need for careful selection of the pilot cohort. It was suggested that the group should include a representative mix of Members with varying levels of digital confidence as well as Members serving on different Committees. Some concern was expressed regarding fairness and the potential

perception of providing additional resources to a selected group. The Deputy Town Clerk emphasised that the proposal constituted a time-limited trial rather than a permanent allocation of resources.

Members discussed digital capability across the Court and noted that some were still developing familiarity with basic digital tools. Members emphasised the importance of continuing to strengthen foundational digital knowledge alongside any future introduction of premium functionality. Officers advised that the Copilot Chat training sessions delivered by DITS would continue to be offered to Members.

Members discussed other AI tools but noted that the pilot would focus on Microsoft Copilot in line with the City Corporation's existing systems and arrangements. In doing so, Members emphasised the importance of maintaining appropriate oversight and exercising critical judgement when reviewing AI-generated content.

It was further suggested that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Digital Services Committee should be engaged in the development and oversight of the pilot, given their expertise and interest in digital transformation.

RESOLVED, that Members:

- Noted the contents of the report.
- Agreed to implement a limited pilot scheme involving a small cohort of volunteer Members trialling the premium version of Microsoft Copilot.
- Authorised the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Director of Digital Information & Technology and the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of this Sub-Committee, to determine arrangements related to the cost, duration and cohort size, with funding for the pilot to be drawn from the Member Learning & Development budget.

7. **PROPOSAL FOR AN INFORMAL AND CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING MECHANISM FOR MEMBER BEHAVIOUR**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk concerning a proposal for the introduction of an informal and confidential reporting mechanism for Member behaviour.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the proposal had arisen from discussions between the Chief Commoner and newer Members and intended to address behavioural concerns at an earlier stage and encourage positive behavioural standards. The mechanism would aim to enable lower-level behavioural concerns to be raised confidentially and addressed informally, where such matters did not meet the threshold for formal complaints under the existing Code of Conduct. It was noted that the proposal sought to complement rather than replace the City Corporation's established formal and informal processes.

Members were generally supportive of maintaining an informal approach to governing Member behaviour. The Chairman, also the Chief Commoner, expressed their preference for resolving issues through direct conversations with

Members where possible, and emphasised their wish that any adopted approach should not restrict future Chief Commoners. Members noted that informal discussions conducted by the Chief Commoner remained an important complementary approach to the statutory standards regime and had been successful in addressing concerns at an early stage and helping to resolve issues before they escalated into formal complaints.

In discussing the benefits of implementing a reporting mechanism, Members observed that maintaining a record could help officers develop a cumulative understanding of patterns of behaviour, particularly where individual incidents might not independently warrant a formal complaint but might indicate a concern when considered together collectively.

A Member queried the barriers that Members currently faced when reporting concerns and the rationale behind introducing a more formal mechanism. Officers replied that individuals may currently be reluctant to come forward due to a perception that they are being bothersome, particularly where matters are considered minor. An anonymous reporting framework could therefore help to alleviate these barriers. Officers further emphasised that the proposed mechanism would operate alongside, rather than replace, existing informal routes, such as speaking with the Chief Commoner or a Past Chief and would provide an additional means of capturing information to support a broader understanding of concerns. It was also noted that the reporting mechanism would be open to officers, who may not always feel they have a clear route for raising similar concerns.

Members discussed the role of data handling, confidentiality and the implications of creating and retaining written records. A Member voiced concern that the existence of a formal record could deter some Members from coming forward, as they may wish to raise issues informally. Another Member highlighted the potential for subject access requests and the associated risk that individuals may seek disclosure of information held about them.

Officers responded that while anonymity could be offered in certain circumstances, disclosures may be required depending on the nature of the request. In the event of a subject access request, information would need to be considered for disclosure, and where a complainant had not remained anonymous, a judgement would be required by officers as to whether their identity should be disclosed. It was emphasised that any such mechanism would need to be supported by clear governance arrangements, including an appropriate data retention schedule and protocols to govern access and disclosure.

The Sub-Committee agreed that further time was required for the Chief Commoner to become more familiar with the role and to assess the operation of existing informal resolution arrangements. It was therefore considered appropriate to defer consideration to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee, with a view to reflecting on current practices before developing any formalised approach.

The Sub-Committee agreed that the item should be brought back for further consideration at its next meeting on 15 October 2026.

RESOLVED, that Members;

- Agreed to defer a decision on the proposal until the next meeting of the Member Development & Standards Sub-Committee on 15 October 2026, pending further consideration of the effectiveness of current arrangements.

8. **CASEWORK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – ORAL UPDATE**

The Sub-Committee received a verbal update from the Assistant Town Clerk on the development of a potential casework management system for Members.

The Assistant Town Clerk advised that a meeting was scheduled with the Director of Information Technology, to explore options for improving how Members' casework enquiries could be filtered and directed to the appropriate departments. It was noted that this work could also assist with the triaging of requests for information arising from committee activity.

Members were informed that no formal proposal had yet been developed, but were assured that this work was underway, with a further update expected in October.

A Member highlighted current challenges they were facing in navigating departmental contacts and noted that enquiries often required engagement with multiple officers across different departments, with limited coordination and visibility of similar requests raised by other Members. The Assistant Town Clerk responded that the proposed approach sought to address these issues by introducing a more centralised point of access, whereby enquiries could be directed automatically to the appropriate service area. This could include the use of shared or generic contact points to improve continuity and reduce delays in responding to Member enquiries. It was further noted that improved handling of enquiries could support the capture of data on the types and volume of requests received, providing greater insight into demand as well as the 'invisible' workload associated with casework.

A Member voiced concerns regarding the accessibility of the City Corporation's website, noting difficulties in locating relevant contact information. The Assistant Town Clerk confirmed that this would be considered as part of the ongoing work.

9. **MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Town Clerk which provided an update on Member Learning and Development activity delivered since February 2026 under the rolling programme of training events.

The Sub-Committee was advised that sessions relating to the research into the City Corporation's historic links to the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TTEAP) had been rescheduled and would now take place following the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 9 July. A Member expressed concern regarding the

revised timing, noting that the original intention had been for the training to take place in advance of the Committee's discussions, and that delivering it afterwards could limit Members' shared understanding of sensitive issues, including appropriate terminology and context.

Members were further informed that a draft evaluation form had been circulated to the Sub-Committee for comment, and feedback was invited on its usability and content. In response, a Member suggested that training sessions would benefit from clearly stated objectives and summary bullet points in advance, with evaluation questions more closely aligned to those objectives in order to provide more meaningful feedback. Officers agreed that this was a helpful suggestion.

A Member, also the Chair of EEDI Sub-Committee, expressed their appreciation to the facilitators of recent EEDI training sessions, noting that they had been well attended and had facilitated positive and constructive discussion.

RESOLVED, that Members;

- Noted the report and its contents.

10. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE**
No questions were raised.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**
There was none.

12. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**
RESOLVED, That - under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

13. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**
RESOLVED, that the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2025 be approved as a correct record.

14. **NON-PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE**
There were no non-public questions.

15. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**
There were discussions around Member roles and responsibilities, Member cyber security training compliance, related party transactions and privileges of past Members.

The meeting ended at 3.25 pm

Chairman

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