

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE (held virtually via Microsoft Teams)**

17 November 2022

Present:-

Councillors M Asvachin, J Bailey, I Hall (Chair), P Maskell, and L Samuel, C Slade and I Hipkin, A Mayes, R Saltmarsh

Apologies:-

Councillors A Connett and R Hodgins

\* **25** **Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Slade **SECONDED** by Anne Mayes and

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July be agreed as a correct record.

\* **26** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

\* **27** **Ethical Governance Framework: Monitoring**

The Committee received the report of the Monitoring Officer ([CSO/22/17](#)) summarising feedback from Co-opted Members of this Committee on their attendance at meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees since the previous meeting monitoring compliance by Members and Officers with the Council's ethical governance framework.

There was positive feedback in the forms with the scoring extremely high for those meetings attended including for Members' Code of Conduct, punctuality and attendance, and appearance and presentation.

Other pleasing observations were that the meeting was well chaired, and the presentation slides were generally excellent and professional.

For another meeting there was a comment that it was difficult to ascertain whether everybody was there due to difficulties in being admitted to a meeting.

Members discussed the report and observations including:

- Logging onto meetings early to allow enough time to be able to access the meeting
- Problems with technology and software and sometimes difficulty in being able to see who was attending a meeting

- Suggesting using introductions at the start of a meeting to make it clear to all attending and observing who was present

The Report was noted.

**28 Ministerial response - Local Government Disqualification Act**

The Committee considered a letter by the Minister of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Paul Scully MP, in response to a letter from the Chair of the Standards Committee about concerns discussed at the last meeting (minute \*22 of the 7 July Standards Committee minutes) about the disqualification criteria for the new Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022. These concerns were that the provisions did not extend to Police & Crime Commissioners (PCCs) or Members of Parliament (MPs).

In response the Minister said standards and conduct for MPs and PCCs were governed under separate regimes with their own mechanisms to disqualify or sanction against unacceptable behaviour. For example, MPs could be recalled under certain circumstances if at least 10% of the constituency electorate signed a petition and that the disqualification rules for PCCs were generally stricter than for Councillors and Mayors.

The Committee noted the letter.

**29 Standards in Public Life: Update on Councillors safety, work on reducing harassment, abuse and intimidation**

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services (CSO/22/18) about the work and steps taken around Councillors' safety and reducing harassment, abuse and intimidation.

Following the review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Council had amended the Members Code of Conduct to further help Members being able to undertake their role without intimidation, abuse, bullying or threatening behaviour from anyone, including the general public.

Guidance from the Local Government Association about handling intimidation had been published on the Members Sharepoint Site and a link was provided in the Report. Members were also given the choice of whether to publish their home addresses on their profile pages on the website and the Member Development Steering Group had recommended a question on personal safety be added to the next Member Wellbeing Survey shortly to be circulated to all Councillors. Future briefing or training events around the issues would be promoted to Members through the Member Bulletins and on the Member Sharepoint Site.

The Committee considered the Report and steps taken and were content with these and future support offered.

### **30 Ethical Governance Survey 2022 - Outcomes and Results**

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services (CSO/22/19) on the Ethical Governance Survey, the responses, and the findings from this.

The Council last tested its approach to ethical governance in 2019. Both Members and Officers had been asked a variety of different questions regarding ethical governance. This time there were a total of 46 responses to the survey of which 32 Councillors and 14 were Officers with an overall response rate of about 60 to 65%.

There was various commentary on the responses, with both positive and some disappointing aspects. Asked about engagement with democracy and the local community and nearly 74% of respondents felt the Council made information easily available about matters considered by the Cabinet and other committees.

In contrast a more negative response to a question about whether officers were trusted by the local community and only 32.6% answered yes. Responses regarding communication of the Council's value to local residents and familiarity of annual statements were also highlighted as something for consideration.

Attention was also drawn to the comments about maintaining or improving standards of conduct within the Council which included issues such accessibility for people with a range of disabilities, language, and member training.

Members discussed the Report and views expressed including:

- Whether more work should be done around engagement with democracy and the local community
- The culture within the Council about challenging decisions and differing responses in applying this to Members and Officers
- More understanding about who was giving responses i.e. was it Officers or Members with a certain view
- Further Code of Conduct sessions were being planned
- The importance of Member training, attendance at sessions was patchy with room for improvement
- Having a good understanding of the Code of Conduct was felt to be essential

Officers were thanked for their efforts on this, and it was agreed that more work should be done on the points raised above. It was also agreed another survey should take place in around 12 months.

The Report was noted.

\* **31**      **Local Determination of Complaints**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services gave a verbal update on recent complaints received about any alleged breach of the Members Code of Conduct.

There had been only one new complaint since the last Committee meeting concerning procedural issues, which had been rejected due to it not falling within the scope of the complaints process.

There was one complaint which was ongoing with a draft report expected shortly, following comments from both subject Member and Independent Persons, in line with the processes.

**NOTES:**

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

\* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 2.39 pm