

Time commenced – 6.00pm
Finished – 6.50pm

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

24 January 2023

Present: Councillors S Khan (Chair), Atwal, AW Graves, M Holmes and Alan Cameron, Peter Purnell and Philip Sunderland

In Attendance: Emily Feenan - Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Alex Hough – Head of Democracy
Steven Mason – Democratic Services Officer

22/22 Apologies

There were none.

23/22 Late Items Introduced by the Chair

There were none.

24/22 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

25/22 Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

26/22 Standards Committee Forward Plan

The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer on Standards Committee Forward Plan.

The report provided members with the opportunity to review and update items on the committee's work programme.

Members noted that the Standards Committee held a broad range of responsibilities in respect of maintaining high standards of behaviour amongst councillors and co-opted members and monitoring the effectiveness of several codes and protocols relating to councillor conduct.

Resolved to agree the Standards Committee Forward Plan detailed at Appendix 1 of the report.

27/22 Review of Working Together Protocol

The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer on Review of Working Together Protocol.

It was reported that the Working Together: Councillor/Officer Protocol formed part of the Council's Constitution and was an important governance tool for managing relationships between Elected Members and Council Officers.

Members noted that whilst it did not form part of either the Councillors' or Employee Codes of Conduct, it was frequently used as a basis for informally managing conduct issues that did not meet the threshold for consideration under the Councillor Complaints Procedure. It was reported that it was also used as the basis for the training of both councillors and officers on understanding mutual roles, accountabilities, and expectations.

The report provided an opportunity for the Standards Committee to consider the content of the Working Together Protocol and to make any recommendations as appropriate in relation to its ongoing development. The Protocol was attached at Appendix 1 of the report and it was noted that any alterations to the Protocol would require the approval of Council.

There was discussion in relation to the use of the protocol as a training tool for both new Councillors and new officers, how it could be used in managing low level conduct issues, and its usefulness as a document for guiding both Councillors and officers. It was reported that the protocol was last updated in 2019. Members noted that the protocol also applied to the Co-opted Members appointed to various Committees.

Members broadly agreed with the protocol and recognised its usefulness to officers, Councillors and Co-opted Members.

Resolved to support the Working Together Protocol and its ongoing development.

28/22 Volume and Outcomes of Councillor Complaints 2022/23

The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer on Volume and Outcomes of Councillor Complaints 2022/23.

The report provided the Committee with an update on the volume and outcomes of Councillor complaints dealt with in the 2022/23 municipal year.

It was reported that four complaints were carried over from the 2021/22 municipal year. It was also reported that two of those complaints concerned the same

Councillor and were broadly related, that both were being investigated and that the Monitoring Officer was awaiting the outcome of those investigations. Members noted that one complaint had been investigated and the Monitoring Officer was seeking an informal resolution and that the matter was now very close to conclusion. It was also noted that in relation to the fourth complaint, the Monitoring Officer had consulted with the Independent Person Advisory Panel and was considering the next steps.

It was reported that six complaints had been received in the 2022/23 municipal year and that four of those had been dismissed and two were still live.

The Monitoring Officer spoke about a small number complaints that it was proving difficult to resolve in accordance with the current complaints procedures and proposed that an additional reason for dismissal be added at paragraph 16 of those procedures. Members noted that this additional reason for dismissal broadly related to circumstances where there was a lack of evidence. The proposed wording was read out to the Committee. There was considerable discussion in relation to the exact wording of that reason for dismissal. Members eventually agreed that authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to amend the proposed wording and that it then be circulated to the Committee for comment, before proceeding to Council for approval.

Resolved:

- 1. to note the volume and outcome of Councillor complaints as outlined in the report; and**
- 2. to delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to amend the proposed wording of the additional reason for dismissal at paragraph 16 of the Procedures for the Assessment and Review of Allegations of Breaches of the Councillors' Code of Conduct and that it then be circulated to the Committee for comment, before proceeding to Council for approval.**

29/22 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

30/22 Summaries of Councillor Complaints 2022/23

The Committee considered an exempt report of the Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer on Summaries of Councillor Complaints 2022/23.

Resolved to note the summaries of Councillor complaints 2022/23 contained in the report.

MINUTES END