

Time commenced – 6.00pm
Finished – 7.13pm

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1 November 2022

Present: Councillors M Holmes (Chair), Atwal, AW Graves 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

12/22 Appointment of Chair

As Councillor S Khan had submitted apologies, Councillor M Holmes was appointed as Chair.

13/22 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor S Khan.

14/22 Late Items Introduced by the Chair

There were none.

15/22 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

16/22 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 August 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 August 2022 were agreed.

17/22 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.

There was a discussion about the last review of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, the Model Code of Conduct published by the LGA and the wider programme of work being carried out by the LGA through the Civility in Public Life programme.

Members discussed the procedures for considering complaints and agreed that they be added, for review, to the Forward Plan for the next municipal year. Members noted that a review could be both internal, through the Standards Committee, and external.

Members discussed discretionary and mandatory training for Members and noted that it was to be added to the Forward Plan for the next municipal year.

Resolved to agree the Standards Committee Forward Plan detailed at Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the addition of a review of the Procedures for the Assessment and Review of Allegations of Breaches of the Councillors Code of Conduct, for the next municipal year.

18/22 Social Media: Best Practice for Councillors

The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer on Social Media: Best Practice for Councillors.

It was reported that social media was a powerful tool for councillors to engage with their electorate. It was also reported, however, that the use of social media also carried considerable risks, including in relation to intimidation, abuse and personal safety, as well as potential legal implications and reputational damage if used improperly.

Members noted that a significant proportion of complaints against councillors received since 2020/21 had involved allegations of misuse of social media and that a recent national survey of councillors also found that almost three-quarters of respondents had received online abuse from members of the public during their terms of office.

The report provided an overview of the risks associated with councillors' use of social media and explored options for the Standards Committee to consider about how those risks could be appropriately managed in future.

There was considerable discussion in relation to this item. This included:

- Support for general guidance being prepared, including guidance on when an individual is acting or not acting in their capacity as a Councillor.
- Support for a best practice guide.
- Support for it being part of the Councillor induction process and that it should include practical examples to show when healthy debate turns into something more sinister.

- There was a proposal that the groups should be spoken to in relation to a member being identified who would have pastoral responsibility and/or be a social media champion.
- Protection/guidance for Councillors when “a line is crossed” and things go wrong and the Council’s duty of care towards Councillors.
- Support for some points to be lifted from the employee social media policy.

In summary, there was strong support for guidance being developed that included best practice and what to do when things go wrong and what protection there was for councillors and/or the development of a Councillor Social Media Policy.

Resolved to agree that a general guidance document on the use of social media by Councillors and/or a Social Media Policy be developed by the relevant officers, subject to the inclusion of the points as outlined at the meeting.

19/22 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 nine complaints were received in the 2021/22 municipal year and that five complaints were dismissed, three complaints had proceeded to investigation and one complaint was still live.

Members noted that four complaints had been received in the 2022/23 municipal year and that one complaint had been dismissed and three were still live.

Resolved to note the volume and outcome of Councillor complaints as outlined in the report.

20/22 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.

21/22 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