

**Minutes of the Ethical Standards
and Member Development Committee**

**8th September, 2017 at 2.30 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

- Present:** Councillor Lewis (Chair);
Councillor S Crumpton (Vice-Chair);
Councillors E M Giles, Sandars, Shackleton, Trow
and Underhill.
- Observers:** Mr Tomkinson and Ms Williams (Independent
Persons).
- Apology:** Councillor P Hughes.

7/17 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee, held on 24th March 2017, be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies from Councillor Shackleton.

8/17 **Welcome**

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome the new Director – Monitoring Officer, Mr Surjit Tour. The Committee also thanked the Interim Monitoring Officer, Mr Phil Tart, for his hard work and support to the Committee.

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9/17 **Member Development Programme**

The remit of the Committee had been widened to incorporate member development and training, including the establishment of a comprehensive and robust member training and development process.

The Director – Monitoring Officer was currently working on the member development, training and support programme and a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee outlining the proposed Member Development, Training and Support Programme.

10/17 **Members' Gifts and Hospitality Register – Annual Review**

Guidance for members on how to treat offers of gifts and hospitality and the process for declaring such offers formed part of the Council's Constitution. This was last reviewed by the Committee in March 2015 as part of the review of the Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer maintained a public register of members' interests and also a record of any gift or hospitality received with an estimated value of at least £100.00. The Register of Members' Gifts and Hospitality was available for inspection by the public at all reasonable hours. Declarations of gifts and hospitality by individual members were also recorded on the Committee Management Information System [CMIS] on the Council's website which was accessible at any time from the internet.

The Committee carried out its inspection of the Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

Whilst members currently declared the receipt of gifts and hospitality, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, members should also declare this receipt at any meeting where it could result in a conflict of interest. The Director – Monitoring Officer undertook to review, as part of the annual review of the Members' Code of Conduct, this issue.

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Resolved:-

- (1) that the work programme be updated to include an annual review of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (2) that, as part of the annual review of the Code referred to in (1) above, the declaration of receipt of gifts and hospitality procedure be reviewed.

11/17 **Committee on Standards in Public Life – Annual Report**

The Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2016-17 was received.

In relation to the section entitled Local Government Standards, it was noted that the Committee on Standards in Public Life continued to keep a watching brief on local government standards since the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 and intended to undertake a review of local government standards during 2017-18.

In addition, the section entitled Ethical Standards for Providers of Public Services was of interest, particularly in connection with the Council's 2030 Vision.

Members welcomed regular updates on these areas as they developed.

Resolved that an update be brought to a future meeting of the Committee in respect of developments arising from reviews undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, in particular Local Government Standards and Ethical Standards for Providers of Public Services.

12/17 **Allegations Update**

The Committee received a verbal update on complaints received in respect of member conduct.

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13/17 **Case Summary**

The Committee considered three external cases.

The first case concerned a Solihull councillor who had been suspended from his cabinet position after an offensive tweet about Grenfell Tower protesters.

The Council had said that an investigation would take place after a complaint had been received.

The second case concerned a Wirral councillor who sent texts stating that she could use her position to “shut up” an investigation into alleged fraud had been found to have breached numerous council conduct codes.

The Labour councillor was the subject of an audit investigation by Wirral Council in 2015 regarding a charity she co-chaired.

A report had found her to be in breach of the council’s code of conduct on four counts relating to her behaviour during and around the time of that investigation.

The breaches included comments made on social media, references to confidential matters in the press and her conduct during the latest investigation.

The third case concerned a north London Labour councillor who had been suspended after allegedly posting tweets which criticised gay pride marchers.

The councillor had been suspended pending investigation and had since resigned from her political party.

(Meeting ended at 3.22 pm)

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