

Minutes of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

13th August 2020 at 4.00pm

- Present:** Councillor Ahmed (Vice Chair);
Councillors Akhter, Dhallu, Hevican, Horton and P Hughes.
- Observers:** Mr John Tew and Mr Richard Phillips (Independent Persons).
- Officers:** Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer; Elaine Newsome – Service Manager – Democracy; Phil Challoner – Civic and Member Services Manager; Trisha Newton – Senior Democratic Services Officer.

23/20 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simms.

24/20 **Minutes**

With the addition of Councillor Horton included as being in attendance, the minutes of the meeting held on 29th June 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

25/20 **Declarations of Interest**

The Vice Chair, Councillor Ahmed, declared an interest in Minute No. 33/20, Allegations Update, and stated he would leave the meeting. It was agreed that Councillor Hevican would Chair the item in the absence of the Vice Chair.



26/20 **Matter of Urgency**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

27/20 **LGA Member Code of Conduct Review**

Further to Minute No. 22/20 (29th June 2020), the Standards Working Group had met in order to make recommendations in relation to the Council's response to the LGA Member Code of Conduct Review consultation.

In addition, the draft Code of Conduct had been circulated to all Members of the Council asking for feedback, along with details of how they could make individual submissions and the webinars available to elected members. The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer had not received any direct feedback from members, however, provisions were in place for Members to respond directly to the LGA with their input.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life had also provided best practice recommendations and these had been taken into consideration in preparing the Council's submission.

The Committee considered the submission and authorised the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to submit the response on behalf of the Council.

Agreed that:-

- (1) the Council's response to the LGA Model Code of Conduct is approved;
- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, be authorised to submit the final response to the LGA concerning the Model Code of Conduct.

28/20

Standards Working Group Update

The Standards Working Group was convened by the Committee with a remit to review the Council's Ethical Framework and had met on three occasions where the following matters had been considered:-

- **Review of the Code of Conduct and Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Allegations**

It was proposed that the review would take place in the Autumn once the LGA had published the Code. The proposed scope of the review and methodology was considered.

- **DBS Checks**

The working group had undertaken to explore corporate policy options in relation to DBS checks for elected members. The matter would be considered at the next meeting of the working group.

- **Registers**

Officers were looking at a self-service option either on CMIS or a facility within the new member portal, to enable members to make revisions to their register of interest. An update would be provided to a future meeting.

- **Retention Policy for Registers**

A report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Working Group with recommendations.

- **Casework**

Concerns were expressed by members that there was no clear guidance with regard to information gathered in relation to casework. A template would be circulated to all elected members to assist with casework/surgeries in relation to GDPR.

- **Remuneration for Independent Persons**

Further to Minute No. 32/19 (4 October 2019), research would be undertaken with regard to remuneration for Independent Persons and this would be included as part of the review of the Code/Arrangements in the Autumn.

Agreed that the scope and methodology for the review of the Code of Conduct/Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Allegations by the Standards Working Group is approved.

29/20

Update on phase two of the Member Development Programme including implementation of the My Councillor Member Portal

The Elected Member Development Programme (MDP) had been continually designed and led by Members.

Phase one of the MDP had concluded prematurely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all scheduled essential and requested learning was delivered successfully. Additional learning interventions requested were also delivered early this year which coincided with Elected Member Personal Development Plan (PDP) meetings that reviewed phase one and considered future interventions and priorities for phase two.

Whilst priority would be given to the pilot and launch of the 'My Councillor' portal, Civic and Member Services would be working with internal providers to explore ways in which existing courses can be delivered via platforms such as MS Teams.

A series of portal demonstrations had informed the design stage that was nearing completion. A pilot group of Elected Members was established and it was anticipated this pilot would commence from September.

Should the pilot be successful, with minimal amendments to the portal required, a phased introduction would commence preceded by extensive training tailored to the skill set of individual members.

It was agreed that members of the Committee should be participating in the pilot and that Councillors Ahmed and Councillor P Hughes would be added to the pilot group.

30/20 **Gifts and Hospitality**

Guidance was available to all members on how to treat offers of gifts and hospitality and the process for declaring such offers. This guidance formed part of the Council's Constitution.

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 web site and could be accessed at any time from the internet.

This guidance would be reviewed as part of the forthcoming review.

Following the Best Practice recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, it was proposed that the Gifts and Hospitality Register was a standing agenda item for future meetings of the Committee.

31/20 **National Case**

The Committee received and discussed details of national case relating to a councillor who had breached the code.

32/20 **Work Programme**

The Committee considered the draft work programme for 2020/21.

Resolved that the work programme for 2020/21 be approved and kept under review during the year.

(Councillor Ahmed left the meeting)

33/20 **Allegations Update**

The Committee received details of complaints received in relation to member conduct and the progress on the complaints.

The Committee requested that timescales for dealing with allegations were reviewed and the Monitoring Officer confirmed that this would be looked at as part of the forthcoming review of arrangements.

The Committee requested that the matters listed should be concluded by the end of the calendar year, with a further update to the next meeting of the Committee outlining timescales and reasons if this was not achievable.

Agreed that a further update be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee, outlining timescales and reasons, if the end of the calendar year was not achievable for concluding cases.

Meeting ended at 5.02pm.