

Standards Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 16 March 2023

Present:

Councillor Simcock – In the Chair

Councillors: Andrews, Connolly, Evans and Nunney

Ringway Parish Council: Councillor O'Donovan

Apologies:

Nicolé Jackson - Independent Co-opted Member

Geoff Linnell - Independent Co-opted Member

Councillor Lanchbury

ST/23/1. Appointment of Chair

Decision

In the absence of Nicolé Jackson, the Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Simcock as Chair for the meeting.

ST/23/2. Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 as a correct record.

ST/23/3. Standards Committee - Annual Report

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor, that provided an update on the matters within the remit of the Standards Committee, since the last annual report produced in March 2022 which covered the period from 1 February 2022 up to 31 January 2022.

The report also provided a summary of work undertaken by the Council Monitoring Officer concerning decisions on complaints made between 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023.

The committee's comments were requested on issues raised within the report and agreement was sought to submit the Annual Report the next meeting of the Council.

The Chair invited member's questions and comments.

A member referred to paragraph 6.5 of the report and asked officers to explain the reasons two complaints listed in the report were not dealt with, due to exceeding the timeframe.

The City Solicitor advised the Committee that the complaints were delayed due to a technical issue in the exchange of emails with the Council's Independent Person. City Solicitor reported that the email issue had been addressed and mechanisms are in place to ensure that all complaints will be dealt with within the timeframe.

The Chair referred to paragraph 4.2 of the report concerning the register of member interests and officers were asked if all elected members had submitted a register of interest's form.

The committee was informed that all elected members are required to have a register of interests in place and during the year, all members are sent four reminders to update their interests form, if required. Two reminders are specific emails, and two emails include the reminder in the Ethical Standards Update. If the elected member has no changes to make since their form was submitted, no update is required. Individual members have the responsibility to update their record, as stated in the Code of Conduct for Members.

Decisions

1. To note the matters reported since the last annual report in March 2022 and the work done by the Council's Monitoring Officer during the period to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors.
2. To agree to submit the report to the next meeting of the Council on 29 March 2023, to provide assurance on standards matters.

ST/23/4. Social Media Guidance for Members update

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor that provided an update on the operation and efficacy of the Social Media Guidance for Members ('the Guidance').

Reference was made to paragraph 2.1 of the report regarding two complaints relating to social media use. One of the complaints was outside of the scope of the member complaints procedure as it related to the member not acting in an official capacity. The Committee was informed that the number of complaints received is very low with one complaint received in the last year and none received in the year before. The Guidance will be reviewed again in 2024.

The Chair invited member's questions and comments.

Officers were requested to circulate the Social Media Guidance to all members and to include the Guidance within induction materials and training for all newly elected members.

A member referred paragraph 3.1 "Blurred Identities", within the Guidance and instances where an elected member uses a personal social media account for council business matters and suggested that any council related business should be released via a separate council business social media account. Officers were asked if

guidance could be included to advise members that personal and council business should be contained in separate accounts.

Officers noted the issue of maintaining the separation of personal and council business released on elected member's social media and agreed to consider the point made of elected members having two separate accounts.

The Chair referred to the description of social media websites and applications listed in paragraph 2 of the Guidance and asked officers to include the TikTok application to the list. Reference was also made to the 3.1 of the guidance, regarding non-disclosure of information given in confidence. Officers were asked what the reaction would be to a councillor releasing information into the public domain given to them in confidence.

The City Solicitor reported that any confidential information provided to a councillor that is then passed into the public domain by the councillor would be investigated as a potential breach of the Code of Conduct for Members. This would also apply to members of staff where a potential breach would be investigated under the Code of Conduct for Employees.

Decision

To note the report and the comments and suggestions received.

ST/23/5. Member Development and Training

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor that provided details on all training delivered since the last report and noted some minor changes to the Member Development Strategy. The committee was advised that the Strategy is proposed to be updated in 2023 to reflect that responsibility for Member Development has moved from the Statutory Deputy Leader's portfolio to the Deputy Leader's portfolio. An amendment was made to the reference in Appendix B of the report 'Inclusive Leadership Training' with the category changed from 'Mandatory' to 'General'.

The Chair invited member's questions and comments.

A member referred to elected member training, where similar or the same training had been undertaken through the elected member's employer or organisation and asked officers if external training is accredited. Reference was also made to paragraph 5.5 of the report, concerning the number of elected members that had not completed Cyber Security training and the reasons for this.

It was reported that the Council has some specifically designed training packages and there is an expectation that all members complete the training. Members are offered help and support to access and undertake Cyber Security training and other training packages.

The City Solicitor reported that all members have been contacted to request them to undertake the training and welcomed suggestions to achieve 100% take up. Training on cyber security is a high priority and very important to the council, in view of the potential dangers to the organisation from cyber-attack.

The City Solicitor undertook to write to the elected members that have not completed Cyber Security training, to make them aware of the concern expressed by the Standards Committee and to request the member to complete the training as a matter of urgency. If the training is not completed following a period specified, the matter would then be raised by the City Solicitor through the member's political group.

The Chair referred to Casework system and how the system can be used. Reference was also made members induction training and advice and guidance provided on member advice surgeries.

It was reported that the Casework system provides elected members with a tool to monitor casework and is a stand-alone application. Elected member ward surgeries are covered in induction sessions under health and safety advice to advise on location and times of surgeries and for help on risk assessment of premises used. The content of advice surgeries is not covered within the induction sessions.

Decisions

1. To note the report on training received since February 2022.
2. To approve the proposed changes to the Member Development Strategy.
3. To approve the action proposed by the City Solicitor to write to elected members that have not completed Cyber Security training, to make them aware of the concern expressed by the Standards Committee and to request the member to complete the training as a matter of urgency. If the training has not been completed following the period specified, the matter will then be raised by the City Solicitor through the member's political group.

ST/23/6. Members' Update on Ethical Governance

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor seeking Committee's comments on and approval of the draft Members' Update on Ethical Governance for March 2023.

The Chair invited member's questions and comments.

In welcoming the Update on Ethical Governance, officers were requested to place Cyber Security training as the first article on the Update to raise member awareness of the importance of the training.

Decisions

1. To approve the content of the draft Members' Update on Ethical Governance set out in the Appendix of the report for circulation to all members.
2. To request officers to place Cyber Security training as the first article on the newsletter.

ST/23/7. Work Programme for the Standards Committee

Consideration was given to the report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit on the Work Programme for the Committee for the year 2023/24.

A member requested the inclusion of an update report on the process for members to complete Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checks and the follow up work to ensure completion.

Decisions

1. To note the Work Programme.
2. To agree that update report on the process for members to complete Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and the follow up work to ensure completion, is included in the Work Programme.