

## Standards Committee

### Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 31 October 2024

#### Present:

Nicolé Jackson, Independent Co-opted Member – In the Chair

Councillors: Connolly, Curley, Evans, Richards and Simcock

Councillor O'Donovan, Ringway Parish Council

Geoff Linnell, Independent Co-opted Member

#### Apologies:

Councillor Good

#### ST/24/17. Minutes

##### Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2024 as a correct record.

#### ST/24/18. Draft Code of Corporate Governance

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor and the City Treasurer that proposed a revised draft of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance (the Code), which was in accordance with published external guidance. Compliance with the Code was monitored on an annual basis through the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

The report described that the Code had been reviewed and updated in consultation with relevant senior officers and broadly the Code remained fit for purpose, with a small number of revisions having been made following this process, these were set out in the report.

The Code would be submitted to Audit Committee in January 2025. Once any comments from Standards and Audit Committees had been incorporated, a final version would be uploaded to the Council's 'Key Governance Documents' webpage.

In response to a question as to how the enhanced emphasis on meaningful and trusted community engagement would be cascaded to all staff across the organisation, the Reform and Innovation Manager advised that the Annual Governance Statement would provide evidence of how this high-level document translated into service approach and delivery. The City Solicitor referred to the recent work undertaken by the Elections Team, in conjunction with the Neighbourhood Teams to raise awareness of voter registration and ID as a positive example of this approach.

The City Solicitor confirmed that this Code also applied to the Ringway Parish Council. She further noted the comments made by a member regarding engagement between the Council and the Parish Council and said that she would discuss with

Director of Communities if it was feasible for Neighbourhood Officers to attend their meetings. She said that an update on this would be provided to the 13 March 2025 meeting of the Committee.

In response to a discussion regarding the final version of the Code and would this be available in other languages, it was noted that this could be arranged upon request, with a Member noting that AI could also greatly assist with translating documents.

### **Decision**

To note the report.

### **ST/24/19. Members' Update on Ethical Governance**

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor and the Monitoring Officer that presented for comment and approval the draft Members' Update on Ethical Governance for October 2024. Following approval this would be circulated to all members by e-mail.

In response to a question regarding gifts and hospitality, Members were advised to seek advice from relevant officers if they were ever in doubt.

### **Decision**

To approve the Members' Update on Ethical Governance as set out in the Appendix in the report submitted.

### **ST/24/20. Process for Dispensations**

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer that provided an update on the operation and efficacy of the process for granting dispensations in relation to Member's Interests. Noting that it was the Monitoring Officer's view that the requests for dispensations that had been made had been sought in appropriate circumstances and that the level of requests for dispensations did not give rise to concern.

A Member commented that timely reminders should be circulated to Councillors in advance of meetings, noting the recent experience at a meeting of Council. The City Solicitor acknowledged the comment and said that appropriate consideration would be given to this.

### **Decision**

The Committee notes the report.

### **ST/24/21. The Register of Members' Interests**

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer that considered the operation and efficacy of the Register of Members' Interests. The Monitoring Officer was of the view that Register of Interests requirements

were understood by Members but would, as a matter of good practice, continue to issue specific guidance to all Members regarding declaration of interests at meetings.

The City Solicitor informed the Committee that she, in consultation with the Deputy Leader was reviewing Members induction training to ensure it was appropriate and relevant to Members. The Assistant Director Legal Services said this work would be progressed, with Member involvement in preparation for the May 2026 elections and that an update report on this activity would be submitted to the 13 March 2025 meeting.

### **Decision**

The Committee notes the report.

#### **ST/24/22. Review of the Operation and Efficacy of the Arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints against Members**

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer that considered the operation and efficacy of the arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints against Members. The Monitoring Officer was satisfied that the Arrangements remained fit for purpose and do not require any further amendments.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director Legal Services said that the Monitoring Officer could use their discretion to extend the deadline given to a Member to submit a written representation following receipt of a complaint, however the Monitoring Officer may proceed with consideration of a complaint in the event of no written representation being submitted by a Member. He commented that all Members are encouraged to comply with the process.

### **Decision**

The Committee notes the report.

#### **ST/24/23. Review of the Operation and Efficacy of the Use of Resources Guidance for Members**

Consideration was given to the report of the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer that considered the operation and efficacy of the of the Use of Resources Guidance for Members.

Since the last report to the Committee on the Guidance, there had been no member conduct complaints received that related to a member's use of Council resources and the Monitoring Officer was of the view that the Guidance was well understood by Members.

In response to a question from a Member, the Monitoring Officer stated that Council resources should not be used for political campaigning or feature in political campaign or election literature, especially in the pre-election period. Council

resources should never be used to actively campaign to secure votes for an individual or political party. Any complaints in relation to this would be subject to the Code of Conduct procedures. The Chair commented that the Guidance reflected the legislation, and it was her experience that the Monitoring Officer would always take a pragmatic approach, noting the discussion amongst the Members, and urged Members to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer if they had any concerns or questions in relation to this matter.

Reflecting upon the discussion, the Assistant Director Legal Services stated that further clarification would be submitted to the 13 March 2025 meeting.

## **Decision**

The Committee noted the report, and the comments received.

### **ST/24/24. Work Programme**

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme.

The Committee agreed to the inclusion of reports to the next meeting of the Committee on 13 March 2025:

- Update on Member Training
- Use of resources guidance for elected members

Councillor Connolly referred to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for elected members and if the receipt of any checks were outstanding.

The City Solicitor reported that there were no outstanding DBS checks for elected members.

Councillor Connolly requested an update to be provided on the date for the renewal of (DBS) checks for elected members.

## **Decisions**

1. The Committee notes the report and agrees the work programme, with the inclusion of the following items agreed following discussion of the previous agenda items.
  - Update on Member Training.
  - Use of resources guidance for elected members.
2. That updates be provided on elected member Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks regarding outstanding checks and renewals.