

Standards Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2018

Present

Independent Co-opted Member: N Jackson – In the Chair
Councillors Andrews, Connolly, and Evans
Ringway Parish Council: Councillor C O'Donovan

Apologies

Councillors Cooley, Kilpatrick and Lanchbury
Independent Person: A Eastwood
Independent Person: S Beswick
Independent Co-opted Member: G Linnell

ST/18/11 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2018 as a correct record with the correction of some typographical errors.

ST/18/12 Member Development

The Committee received the report of the City Solicitor which reported on the induction programme delivered to new Councillors in May 2018, the training provided to Councillors over the last 12 months and set out the proposed Member Development strategy for new and existing Councillors.

There were 15 new Councillors elected at the May 2018 election, and all have now undergone induction training. The 2018 programme was divided into two sessions. The first session focused on legal and constitutional matters, including code of conduct for members, gifts and hospitality guidance, data protection, member / officer relations, access to information/need to know, use of Council resources guidance, Social Media guidance and governance and decision making. There was also an interactive session where members worked through a case study.

The second session, held three weeks later, focused on key information, including 'Our Manchester', listening in action events and an invitation to attend the 'Our Manchester Experience', Budget and key strategies, Equality, Health and Safety. Training for Councillors covered the Strengths and Development needs audit for Councillors (see below) and e-learning opportunities. There was also a presentation on casework. The first part was delivered by a neighbourhood team strategic leader focusing on their service and how they can support members. The second part was delivered by an experienced Councillor and focused on practical advice and tips.

Officers told the Committee that a training needs analysis has been produced by HROD which will feed back to the Member Development Working Group (MDWG). The analysis has been designed to assist with the development of a more focussed

and proactive approach to member development, and while this is an encouraging start the end result should be a documented programme with very clear reporting and responsibility streams. Officers explained that there will be a further detailed report to the November meeting to include findings of the current exercise, Terms of Reference and an explanation of the resources available.

The Committee were also told that another experienced member will join the MDWG, and while the Committee welcomed the addition questioned whether this should be another group officer, or a member who did not hold a group office? Officers agreed to feedback this comment to the MDWG for their consideration.

The Committee broadly welcomed the improvements in the development and training programme, but added that some of the development training should be open to all members, particularly that around Budget and Key Strategies. In addition, the Committee commented that there should be alternatives to e-learning packages where the learning was currently exclusively presented in this way, as this could be a barrier to some members accessing training if they were uncomfortable with this method of delivery.

The Committee also requested that the detailed report in November include information regarding the steps that are or could be taken if members do not attend training and whether there are any sanctions available. They also requested that information be clearly delineated between the number of members who expressed an interest in training and those who ultimately registered to attend the training, as in some cases members could express an interest and later realise that they were unavailable to attend the arranged session so did not finally enrol.

The Committee did comment that the volume of training that had been offered over the year, as shown in the Appendix did seem to be limited given the size of the authority.

Decision

1. To note the report.
2. To provide further feedback on the detailed report to be received in November.

ST/18/13 Standards Committee - Annual Report

The Committee received the report of the City Solicitor which reported on the work undertaken by the Council's Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee since November 2016 in relation to the matters within the remit of the Committee.

The Committee agreed at its March 2016 meeting to move the scheduled date of its annual report from November 2017 to March 2018 to better inform the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) by collating at the most appropriate time the assurances provided by the Committee based on its work during the municipal year. For this reason the date of the Standards Committee Annual report was moved from November 2017 to March 2018.

The Committee commented that the table of complaints received was in a new and more helpful format. Officers explained that an emerging theme of complaints seemed to be around bullying and aggressive conduct, but that as complainants are encouraged to self identify the type of complaint this was not always the most appropriate fit for the description of the behaviour complained of.

The Committee commented that while they agreed that member training did include the more serious aspects of aggressive behaviour and bullying, there might be a need for some softer skill training in areas such as conflict management and dealing with difficult situations.

Officers confirmed that the outcomes to complaints at all stages were always in conjunction and agreement with the Independent Person, and agreed that the table heading should clearly reflect this. Officers confirmed that they will amend the column heading accordingly.

Decision

1. To note the work done in the last year by this Committee and by the Council's Monitoring Officer to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors.
2. To agree that the report should be forwarded to full Council for assurance on standards issues.
3. To note that the next report will be in November to continue to synchronise with the Annual Governance Statement.

ST/18/14 Standards Committee – Work Programme

The Committee received the report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which allowed the Committee to consider and revise its work programme for future meetings.

Officers explained that there was a section for unscheduled items, and that some of these would most appropriately be included in other reports, for example, the review of the operation and efficacy of the process for granting dispensations.

However, the Committee also decided that they wanted a separate report on the operation and efficacy of the process for updating the Register of Members Interests as the current process relied on members being proactive in reporting changes, which might not always occur to them. The Committee suggested that there be a schedule of reminding members that it was important that their entry in the register of Members Interests was up to date at all material times.

Officers confirmed that a review was being undertaken regarding processes and procedures that supported the Register of Members Interests, and that the review outcomes would be reported back to the Committee in March 2019. Officers agreed that this issue would be considered as part of the review.

Decision

To note the report.