



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **Tuesday 10th March, 2020**, Room 18.12 - 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Judith Warner (Chairman), David Boothroyd, Ian Adams, Richard Beddoe, Louise Hyams and Nafsika Butler-Thalassis

Also Present: Councillor Rachael Robathan (Leader of the Council), Elizabeth Walters (Independent Person), Tasnim Shawkat (Monitoring officer), Hazel Best (Principal Solicitor) and Reuben Segal (Head of Committee & Governance Services)

Apologies for Absence: Asif Iqbal and Shajad Hussain (Independent Persons)

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Butler-Thalassis had replaced Councillor McAllister.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were none.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 be signed by the chairman as a correct record of the proceedings.

4 BI-ANNUAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE REPORT (MARCH 2018-MARCH 2020)

- 4.1 Tasnim Shawkat, Monitoring Officer, introduced the item stating that it is considered best practice for the council to receive an annual or biannual report in relation to standards.
- 4.2 The Committee considered and commented on a draft biannual report which covered the committee's work between March 2018 and March 2020. The Monitoring Officer advised that the provision of such a report emphasises the

importance the council places on the profile of ethical standards across the organisation and affords the opportunity to highlight key achievements and areas of good practice and identify any requirements for improvement.

- 4.3 The committee welcomed the report and put forward a number of suggested changes which included providing an explanation of how the council's Independent Persons are appointed as well as referencing all of the councillors that had sat on the committee over the period that the report covers.
- 4.4 The Committee suggested that thought should be given when drafting the next biannual report on whether the committee's work should be presented thematically rather than chronologically. Members also suggested that future reports could include more statistics such as figures on the number of complaints received against members each year alleging a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 4.5 **RESOLVED:** That subject to the recommended changes being incorporated the report be approved and recommended to Full Council for noting.

5 Q&A WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON ETHICAL STANDARDS

- 5.1 As part of its efforts to raise the profile of standards the Committee last year agreed to invite the Leader of the Council to attend one of its meetings each year to answer questions on ethical standards.
- 5.2 The chairman welcomed Councillor Rachael Robathan, Leader of the Council, to the meeting. She then invited committee members to submit questions to Councillor Robathan on a range of ethical standards matters to which she replied as follows:
1. Q. Did she accept that issues of bullying are on the increase but that members may be unconscious of how their behaviour is perceived. Therefore, is additional guidance for members required?

A. Councillor Robathan stated that bullying can be inadvertent but also intentional. It needed to be dealt with properly and there should be training for members on what constitutes bullying. She also stated that as society has changed words that may have once been acceptable are not so now and care is required to avoid offending people. She referred to the fact that training on issues such as bullying, diversity and unconscious bias were covered as part of the recent mandatory Members' Code of Conduct training but she agreed that more training for members on these issues would be beneficial.
 2. Q. The Council has previously adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of Anti-Semitism. Did she consider that the council should also adopt the All Party Group of British Muslims definition of Islamophobia as some have requested?

- A. Councillor Robathan commented that the council has made a strong statement against any form of prejudice on a number of occasions therefore she did not believe there is a need to adopt every definition of hate crime.
3. Q. The Council has put in place measures to increase the representation of women and those from BME groups at senior management level including requiring diverse representation on officer appointment panels for such posts. The leader was asked whether similar measures are required to increase the diversity of elected representatives in the city?
- A. The Leader of the Council stated that whilst it is important for elected representatives to mirror the wider Westminster community it is difficult to be prescriptive. She reflected that being a councillor is a big commitment and not everyone wants or is able to do this. However, she did support encouraging people to become councillors but believed that it is a matter for the political parties to address rather than the council. However, she did think that the Council could better promote the work that Councillors undertake.
4. Q. Should the council develop a strategy for member development and how can attendance at training sessions be improved upon?
- A. Councillor Robathan stated that the member development programme for the coming year is being developed. She noted the committee's comments regarding the need for more advanced notice of training events and more visible and better information on the relevance of specific training and undertook to address this as part of the plan for the programme's delivery.
5. Q. The Leader of the Council was asked about her vision for standards for elected representatives and whether there are any issues she thinks the committee might wish to focus on in the coming year.
- A. The Leader stated that Westminster's councillors need to lead by example and display the highest level of ethical standards by being a model of tolerance to people from all backgrounds while being open and answerable. She considered that the manner in which councillors converse with one another and the language which they use is important. She reflected that members should be able to engage in robust political debate without insulting one another. She asked the committee to consider whether there is merit in developing a guide on the use of language during debates at council meetings which would assist the Lord Mayor to rule on inappropriate conduct.
- 5.3 The chairman thanked the Leader of the Council for attending the meeting. Councillor Robathan thanked the committee for their work which she considered to be important.

6 REVIEW OF THE MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

- 6.1 The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which set out the draft timetable for the review of the model code of conduct by the Local Government Association (LGA).
- 6.2 The Committee discussed the process by which the council would respond to the consultation by the 24 April 2020 deadline.
- 6.3 In response to questions, the Monitoring Officer stated that she did not know whether the consultation would consist of a series of questions for members to respond to. The committee suggested that it would be useful for officers to formulate some questions for members to comment on in the absence of any questions put forward by the LGA. The chairman suggested that in replying to the consultation committee members have regard to the LGA's objectives in reviewing the model code of conduct which were set out in paragraph 3.4 of the committee report.
- 6.4 **RESOLVED:**
1. That the time table set out by the LGA for the review of the LGA model code of conduct be noted;
 2. That it be noted that the Monitoring Officer will respond to the consultation on behalf of the City Council, having considered any views expressed by the Committee, Members of the Council and the independent Persons;
 3. That it be noted that the Principal Solicitor will circulate to Members details of the consultation once published and will invite Members to forward any comments to her by 10 April 2020.

7 WORK PROGRAMME

- 7.1 The Chairman invited members of the committee and the council's Independent Persons to submit suggestions for items for inclusion in the committee's work programme.
- 7.2 **RESOLVED:**
1. That the draft work programme for 2020-2021 be noted including the agenda items for the next meeting on 2 July 2020.
 2. That the actions and the outcomes from the last meeting be noted.

The Meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____