



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **Monday 5th December, 2022**, Room 18.06, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Patricia McAllister (Chair), Melvyn Caplan, Md Shamsed Chowdhury, Sara Hassan and Rachael Robathan

Also Present: Asif Iqbal and Elizabeth Walters (Independent Persons)

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillors Rachael Robathan and Melvyn Caplan were substituting for Councillors Tim Mitchell and Louise Hyams.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

3.1 RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2022 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4 ANNUAL Q&A WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON ETHICAL STANDARDS

- 4.1 As part of its efforts to raise the profile of standards the Committee had agreed to invite the Leader of the Council to attend one of its meetings each year to answer questions on ethical standards.
- 4.2 The Chair welcomed Councillor Adam Hug, Leader of the Council, to the meeting. Committee members were invited to submit questions to Councillor

Hug on a range of ethical standards matters and the following areas were covered:

- Conflict Resolution – With regards to conflict resolution between Councillors it was explained that there was no explicit reference to it in the member complaints procedure. However, the Monitoring Officer, or other officer, did have discretion to suggest mediation or recommend another informal type of resolution as long as all parties consented. The Committee noted it would often depend on the type of complaint, some of which may be considered Group matters and be dealt with by the Whips accordingly. The Council was always open to new ideas though and going forward best practice elsewhere could be considered.
- Social Media - An online refresher session was held in June 2021 on the Members Code of Conduct with a focus on social media. In addition, in May 2022 reference was made to standards and social media in the post-election code of conduct sessions held for all Members. These sessions were well received, and it was suggested these be rerun, especially that there was now a significant number of new Councillors. The sessions focused on how Councillors could use social media to communicate to their residents, how to engage in healthy debate and what to consider when publishing or sharing online.
- Councillor Training - All Members attended the member code of conduct training in May 2022, held in various formats including in-person groups, smaller hybrid group sessions and on a 1:1 basis (hybrid and in person). For regulatory committees such as Planning and Licensing, training was mandatory in order to sit on these committees, and this had been completed by all those Councillors as necessary. In order to encourage attendance training was, where possible, held in a hybrid fashion where Members could attend in person or remotely. Training was also held on an evening in order to capture those Members who worked. Members were encouraged to forward on any ideas for future training sessions, especially on topics they think Councillors would be interested in.
- Personal Safety Training - The Committee was particularly interested in personal safety training which although it was noted it couldn't be made mandatory and didn't form part of the code of conduct, it was felt this should be offered on an ongoing basis in different formats and be as broad and accessible as possible. The Committee was pleased to note that two personal safety sessions had already been held this year and would continue to be offered on an ongoing basis as it was an area that was very important. As part of the personal safety of Councillors the Committee discussed having a structured process in place for Members who were, or felt, threatened or intimidated whilst undertaking their Council duties.
- Code of Conduct Update – The Committee discussed with the Leader the use of language at Council meetings. Whilst it was recognised that

it was important for robust debate to take part at meetings it was essential these debates remained respectful, constructive and accessible to residents. In order to ensure best practice comparisons with the code of conducts at comparable local authorities and Parliament could be considered and if appropriate any relevant changes made.

- Member/Officer Protocol Review - The Committee was pleased to note the substantial nature of the review and that it was carried out effectively, involving consultation with officers and Members through their Whips. It also involved looking at best practice from other authorities. The protocol then went through both the Standards Committee and the General Purposes Committee where their views were taken into account before going to Full Council where it was unanimously approved. Its success would be measured through watching for any trends or patterns in member or officer complaints, judicial challenges, queries from auditors or ombudsman queries. If anything in particular was identified these would be reported back to the statutory officers' group and appropriate steps taken to try and resolve any issues arising. The Committee was interested to learn that The Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer, would be leading sessions for both members and officers to emphasise and repeat the key messages from the updated protocol.

4.3 The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council for attending the meeting. Councillor Hug thanked the Committee for all their work which he considered to be very important.

5 ANNUAL UPDATE ON MEMBER COMPLAINTS

5.1 The Monitoring Officer introduced the annual report which provided details of complaints against members of the Council between November 2021 to October 2022. It was confirmed that during this period three complaints had been received. The Committee was provided with an overview of the nature of the complaints and it was confirmed that none of these had been referred to the Standards Committee for a hearing.

5.2 RESOLVED:

That the outcomes of the Members complaints referred to in the report be noted.

6 WORK PROGRAMME

6.1 The Committee noted the 2022-23 Work Programme.

The Meeting ended at 7.10 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____