



City of Westminster

# Committee Agenda

Title: **Standards Committee**

Meeting Date: **Thursday 13th July, 2023**

Time: **6.30 pm**

Venue: **Room 18.05, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP**

Members: **Councillors:**  
Ruth Bush (Chair)  
Louise Hyams  
Md Shamsed Chowdhury  
Sara Hassan  
Tim Mitchell



**Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion Part 1 of the Agenda**

**Admission to the public gallery is by ticket, issued from the ground floor reception from 6.00pm. If you have a disability and require any special assistance please contact the Committee Officer (details listed below) in advance of the meeting.**

**If you require any further information, please contact the Committee Officer, Tristan Fieldsend, Senior Committee and Councillor Co-ordinator.**

**Email: [tfieldsend@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:tfieldsend@westminster.gov.uk); Tel: 07812 760 335  
Corporate Website: [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk)**

**Note for Members:** Members are reminded that Officer contacts are shown at the end of each report and Members are welcome to raise questions in advance of the meeting. With regard to item 2, guidance on declarations of interests is included in the Code of Governance; if Members and Officers have any particular questions they should contact the the Director of Law in advance of the meeting please.

## **AGENDA**

### **PART 1 (IN PUBLIC)**

**1. MEMBERSHIP**

To note any changes to the membership.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive declarations by Members and Officers of the existence and nature of any pecuniary interests or any other significant interest in matters on this agenda.

**3. MINUTES**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2023 as a correct record of proceedings.

**(Pages 3 - 4)**

**4. SAFETY PROTOCOL FOR COUNCILLORS**

Report of the Director of Law and Governance

**(Pages 5 - 10)**

**5. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

**(Pages 11 - 16)**

**Stuart Love  
Chief Executive  
5 July 2023**



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

## MINUTES

### Standards Committee

#### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **Thursday 20th April, 2023**, Room 18.12, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Patricia McAllister (Chair), Ruth Bush, Sara Hassan and Tim Mitchell

**Also Present:** Asif Iqbal (Independent Person)

#### 1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Bush was substituting for Councillor Chowdhury.
- 1.2 It was noted that Councillor Hyams had joined the meeting remotely and would participate in the discussions on the agenda items, however it was confirmed that she would not be able to vote on any of the items.

#### 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 5 December 2022 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

#### 4 FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS FROM THE LEADERS Q&A SESSION

- 4.1 The Committee received a report which provided a follow-up on the key actions which emerged from the Question-and-Answer Session on ethical standards held with the Leader of the Council at the previous meeting of the Committee
- 4.2 The Committee discussed the harassment and intimidation of Councillors and expressed concern that Councillors were facing increasing levels of abuse

and intimidation. It was recognised that rights to object and constructive challenge were both key components of democracy, but abuse and intimidation of Councillors was unacceptable. Members considered what reporting processes were currently in place at the Council for Councillors if they did experience any intimidatory behaviour from a member of the public and what steps would be taken.

- 4.3 Following a detailed discussion Members agreed that following a review of best practice at other local authorities' explicit reference should be made in the Members Code of Conduct to state that Councillors should expect respectful behaviour from the public and that if they did have any concerns these should be reported. The Committee requested that at its next meeting a Westminster specific document be circulated providing practical advice for Councillors on what steps they can take if experiencing any threatening/intimidatory behaviour.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Members Code of Conduct be amended to state that Councillors should expect respectful behaviour from the public and that if they have any concerns these should be reported to the Monitoring Officer.

**5 WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

- 5.1 The Committee noted the 2023-24 Work Programme and was asked to consider any items they would like to come to future meetings. Following earlier discussions Members requested a practical guide on how to deal with abusive behaviour from members of the public be brought to a future meeting. It was also noted that the Standards Committee Biennial Report would come to the meeting scheduled for 22 February 2024.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed future Member training and requested that a session on diversity be included in the training programme. A concern was also noted that two separate training sessions were being held on the Code of Conduct and Member/Officer Protocol and considered whether it would be more practicable for Members to have them held jointly.
- 5.3 The Committee also offered its congratulations to Asif Iqbal MBE on his appointment to the British Sign Language Advisory Board.

The Meeting ended at 7.36pm.

**CHAIRMAN:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE** \_\_\_\_\_



## City of Westminster Standards Committee

<b>Meeting:</b>	Standards Committee
<b>Date:</b>	13 July 2023
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Safety Protocol for Councillors
<b>Report of:</b>	Parveen Akhtar – Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 During discussions held at its previous meeting the Committee highlighted matters relating to the personal safety of elected Members and requested a Westminster specific document come before it, providing practical advice for Councillors on what steps they can take if experiencing any threatening/intimidatory behaviour.
- 1.2 The purpose of the discussion at the Committee was to help ensure the Council had measures in place to support Councillors in maintaining their personal safety and provide support and advice to Councillors where necessary.
- 1.5 This report sets out details of the support in place, including the Member Safety Protocol, and provides a note of the measures taken to try to ensure the safety of Councillors.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the contents of the report be noted, and any further actions be identified for consideration.

### 3. Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Concerns about the impact that an increasing level of intimidation and toxicity of debate is having on the personal safety of councillors is not a new issue and is regarded as one of the significant factors in individuals choosing not to

stand as a Councillor which could have implications for future democratic representation.

- 3.2 Councillors are at the centre of local democracy. Elected from amongst their local community and forming a vital link between councils and residents. However, increasing levels of abuse and intimidation in political and public discourse are negatively impacting democracy at local and national levels. It is recognised that rights to object and constructive challenge are both key components of democracy, but abuse and intimidation cross the line into unacceptable behaviour and serve to silence democratic voices and deter people from engaging with politics.
- 3.3 The role of Councillor has changed in a number of ways over the years particularly due to advances in technology. While much of this has been positive, resulting in Members' being more visible and accessible to residents, it has also led to Members being more exposed as they are easier to contact both online and by easy access to contact details. Personal safety can easily be taken for granted and it is essential to note that every individual is responsible for taking steps to keep themselves safe in any environment.
- 3.4 To complement and reinforce the steps that Members can take themselves, this report seeks to signpost to what is already in place to help Councillors manage the risks associated with carrying out their role and highlight sources of relevant advice. The Council aims to take a proactive approach to dealing with the personal safety of elected members. A number of measures are in place to provide support, guidance and training, as set out below:
- Code of Conduct: The Council's Code of Conduct sets out the standards of conduct required of councillors and is designed to protect this democratic role, encourage good conduct and safeguard the public's trust in local government.
  - Home addresses: Some members have chosen to ask that the Council does not publish their home addresses on the Council's website. The Director of Law and Governance has the ability to withhold publication of home addresses in the register of interests if the member considers that its publication could put them at risk.
  - Internal Guidance: The Councillors Safety Protocol attached as Appendix A was developed by People Services and the Legal Team in response to some incidents and was agreed with the Whips, Group Leaders and the Chief Executive. It is available on the Councillor Hub and sets out how to deal with unacceptable behaviour and how to report any incidents.
  - LGA Guidance: LGA guidance is regarded as one of the best resources on safety information for councillors. The guidance can be found [here](#) and includes guidance on handling harassment, abuse and intimidation, practical advice for handling online abuse and practical advice for handling physical abuse and personal security. The LGA also provides

training for councillors on personal safety and handling abuse and intimidation online.

- Training: Two personal safety courses for members were held in 2022 as part of the induction programme with another scheduled to take place in November 2023, this will be facilitated by an external trainer. Social media training has also been provided previously and another session will be held on 28 September 2023. This will provide advice on dealing with online abuse, harassment, or 'trolling' and will cover best practise principles for safeguarding against bullying on social media. The training will ensure members are clear what is and is not acceptable online and it will complement the general rules under the Code of Conduct.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications for this report.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 When a candidate is successfully elected, their contact details are published online. Members are provided with a City Council email address so they do not have to give out their personal contact details and they may also use the City Council offices as their published correspondence address on their main website profile.
- 5.2 Councillors are required to register disclosable pecuniary interests which include any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the Council. Sufficient detail should be given to identify the land in question, which will probably include a home address. Where a councillor considers that disclosure of the details of such an interest could lead to their, or a person connected with them, being subject to violence or intimidation, they can make a request to the Director of Law and Governance in relation to what is termed a sensitive interest. If she agrees that that risk arises if the interest is entered on the register, copies of the register that are made available for inspection and any published version of the register will exclude details of the interest, but will state that the councillor has an interest, the details of which are withheld. The Director of Law and Governance will treat such requests sympathetically where there are legitimate concerns of abuse or intimidation.

#### **6. Carbon Impact**

- 6.1 The decision will have no carbon impact.

## **7. Consultation**

7.1 The report is for information only.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Councillor Safety Protocol

### **Background Papers:**

Local Government Association: Councillors' Guide to Handling Harassment, Abuse and Intimidation: <https://www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-harassment-abuse-and-intimidation>

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact:**

Tristan Fieldsend, Senior Committee and Councillor Co-Ordinator



## **Safety protocol for Councillors**

The Council takes any attack on one of its Councillors, whilst they are conducting their duties as an elected official, very seriously and have therefore put in place a series of steps to guide you through this process. We understand that any experience of this nature can be very distressing, and the Governance and Councillor Liaison Team are in place to provide help and support as soon as any incidents are raised with them.

The steps are listed below but no decisions will be taken on behalf of a Councillor without the Councillor's agreement; this is a joint process.

The steps set out the how the team and the Councillor will work together, if a threatening email or a phone call is received and you have concerns over the contents or you are threatened in person.

We would encourage Councillors to ensure they retain any documents or emails relevant to the incident in case of any legal action that might follow.

1. Janis Best (Committee and Councillor Support Manager, [jbest@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:jbest@westminster.gov.uk)) in the Governance and Councillor Liaison (GCL) Team is here to support any Councillor and will act as case manager and single point of contact for the Councillor throughout the process. She should be contacted in the first instance if a Councillor has experienced a threat.
2. With the permission of the Councillor, Janis will notify the Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison, who in turn will inform the Leader and Whip of the relevant political group, as well as the Chief Executive and Director of People Services (HR).
3. The GCL Team will provide advice to the Councillor on what they should do (e.g. reporting this to the Police and/or communications blocking as appropriate) and what the team will do, as below.
4. The GCL Team will also provide advice and signposting on any additional support the Councillor might wish to access from the Council's Employee Assistance Services.
5. With the permission of the Councillor, the GCL team will contact the Public Protection and Licensing team for any Police liaison, plus any other appropriate support services e.g. Mental Health team, Children's Services, Housing to seek information on whether the emailer/caller is already in receipt of Council services. Where appropriate and necessary the Council's Legal team will be engaged to support any civil or criminal action undertaken.
6. Janis will keep the Councillor regularly updated on the case and keep the Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison informed on case progress, who will in turn keep senior leaders updated.

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<b>Date:</b>	<b>13 July 2023</b>
<b>Classification:</b>	<b>For General Release</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Work Programme 2023-2024</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>The Director of Law and Governance</b>
<b>Financial Summary:</b>	<b>There are no financial implications arising from this report.</b>
<b>Report Author and Contact Details:</b>	<b>Tristan Fieldsend, Senior Committee and Councillor Co-ordinator</b> <b>Email: <a href="mailto:tfieldsend@westminster.gov.uk">tfieldsend@westminster.gov.uk</a></b>

### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Members are asked to review the work programme for 2023-2024 set out as Appendix 2 to the report and identify any other items it wishes to include on it.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That, having regard to the Committee's Terms of Reference attached as Appendix 1 of this report the Committee indicate any further items it wishes to be added to its future Work Programme.

### **3. Background Information**

- 3.1 The production of a work programme is to enable the Committee to review and update its forthcoming work plan at each of its meetings.
- 3.2 In order to ensure the Committee undertakes its work programme three meetings per annum have been programmed.

### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications.

### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

**If you have any questions about this report, or wish to inspect one of the background papers, please contact:  
Tristan Fieldsend, Senior Committee and Councillor Co-ordinator  
[tfieldsend@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:tfieldsend@westminster.gov.uk)**

Background Papers: None.

## **STANDARDS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **CONSTITUTION**

5 Members of the Council, 3 Majority Party Members and 2 Minority Party Member.

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- (1) To promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the Members and Co-opted Members of the City Council.
- (2) To advise the City Council on the adoption or revision of a Code of Conduct for Members.
- (3) Advising, training or arranging to train Members and Co-opted Members on matters relating to the City Council's Code of Conduct for Members.
- (4) To assist Members and Co-opted Members observe the City Council's Code of Conduct for Members.
- (5) To monitor the operation of Code of Conduct for Members.
- (6) Consider reports referred to the Committee by ethical standards officers or the Monitoring Officer of investigations into alleged breaches of the City Council's Code of Conduct for Members.
- (7) Where necessary, to conduct hearings into allegations of breaches of the said code, and interview officers, Members and others as required.
- (8) Determining whether allegations of breaches of the said code are made out and determining what action, if any, to take in relation hereto including, where it is determined that a breach has occurred, deciding what sanctions, if any, should be applied in relation to the Member or Member concerned (and for the avoidance of doubt, the Committee shall only have power to impose any sanction authorised by law).
- (9) Consider any complaints in respect of Members referred to the Committee under the City Council's "Whistleblowing" procedure and determining the action to be taken, if any.
- (10) To the extent allowed by the Law, granting dispensations in relation to Member and co-opted Member interests as referred to in the Members Code of Conduct.
- (11) To consider, advise and, if appropriate, take action upon other Member conduct issues not otherwise dealt with under these terms of reference.

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# Work Programme 2023/24

## Standards Committee

<b>13 July 2023</b>		
<b>Safety Protocol for Councillors</b>	To receive an update on measures in place to support Councillors in maintaining their personal safety.	Parveen Akhtar
<b>29 November 2023</b>		
<b>Annual Update on Member Complaints</b>	To receive a report on complaints against members.	Parveen Akhtar
<b>Annual Q&amp;A with the Leader of the council on Ethical Standards</b>	To submit questions to the Leader of the Council on Ethical standards in relation to Members.	
<b>23 February 2024</b>		
<b>Annual Code of Conduct Review</b>	To receive an annual report reviewing the Code of Conduct.	Parveen Akhtar
<b>Biennial Standards Committee Report</b>	To consider a report on the work of the committee since March 2022.	Tristan Fieldsend

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