



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **Thursday 5th July, 2018**, Room 3.4, 3rd Floor, 5 Strand, London, WC2 5HR.

Members Present: Councillors Judith Warner (Chairman), David Boothroyd, Melvyn Caplan, Louise Hyams, Patricia McAllister and Robert Rigby.

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Melvyn Caplan was replacing Councillor Danny Chalkley.

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 March 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record of proceedings.

4 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER

- 4.1 The Chairman introduced the item and advised that the Member Development Charter and Charter Plus had been produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) and that it acted as a framework for councils to model their own member training needs. Members heard that around 80% of councillors had already attended the Member Development Programme and the Chairman welcomed the input provided by the Council's legal officers, although it was important that attendances levels should be even higher. Councillor Melvyn Caplan added that he thought the organisation of the Members' Induction Programme was better organised this year and that it had impressed upon new Members that they were joining a professional organisation. The Chairman then invited the Committee to give views on the Member Development Charter and Charter Plus.

- 4.2 Councillor David Boothroyd referred to section 1.1 of the Charter and suggested that the development of councillors should be a priority of the Standards Committee as well as the Leader of the Council. However, he felt that the training already provided by the Council met most of the requirements set out in section 1.1. In respect of section 1.4, Councillor Boothroyd felt that there was already an adequate designated budget for Member development in place. He suggested that consideration in respect of availability of Members for training should be taken into account, especially as some were in full time work. Councillor Boothroyd added that such a Charter could be made more specific to the Council's needs.
- 4.3 Councillor Patricia McAllister emphasised the importance of ensuring that any training initiatives were presented effectively to ensure a high Member sign up. She felt that there needed to be more officers available to help support Members' training needs and concurred that Members' availability needed to be taken into consideration. Councillor McAllister also highlighted the importance of Members working relationship with officers and she suggested that there could be a training session on this.
- 4.4 Councillor Melvyn Caplan stated that he was familiar with the LGA and had served on some of their committees. Although there were some useful suggestions in the Charter, Councillor Caplan commented that the LGA needed to take into account that it was serving the interests of all types of councils, including metropolitan boroughs, district councils and parish councils. The Council therefore needed to ensure that training was appropriately tailored to meet the needs of its own Members. Councillor Caplan queried how investment in learning and development could be regularly evaluated, as suggested in section 3.1 of the Charter. In respect of the Charter's suggestion in section 3.2 that learning is shared with other councillors, officers and stakeholders, he queried how this could be achieved in practical terms. Councillor Caplan emphasised the importance of cross party support for training initiatives to succeed, as well as from the Leader. Furthermore, the leaders of the political groups and party whips should also play a role in encouraging Members to participate in training. Councillor Caplan concluded by stating that the GLA's Charter gave some structure and guidelines on what to base Members' training on, but efforts should now be made to ensure training was specific to Westminster Members' needs. Member Development also played a role in training future leaders, whilst experienced councillors needed to be kept up to date in matters such as changes to legislation and the way the Council works.
- 4.5 Councillor Robert Rigby commented that Member Development played a crucial role and it was important that Members had appropriate support and access to appropriate pathways, as well as having an understanding of how the Council works. Efforts should also be made to ensure that Members were aware that training was in their interests and for their benefits and that they were given sufficient options in what areas they wanted to focus on. The Charter was also silent in terms of helping Councillors to address the stresses they may encounter in their roles as elected members.
- 4.6 Councillor Louise Hyams felt that there was no particular need for a Charter

and that the Standards Committee had cross party representation. Councillor Hyams stressed that councillors were elected members to represent their constituents and were not professionals in a strictly work sense. Councillors' activities were guided by the advice of officers and the views of residents and Councillor Hyams felt that obliging councillors to undertake training would be excessive. She added that new councillors also had mentors provided by their political groups. Councillor Hyams acknowledged the importance of the Members Induction, however any further training needed to be countered by the time councillors spent in serving their residents' priorities.

- 4.7 Sir Stephen Lamport, Independent Member, felt that any Charter should give an oversight on what it wants to achieve. It was important that the Member Development Programme offered training that would both be useful and interesting to councillors.
- 4.8 Members noted the written comments submitted by Councillor Danny Chalkley who was unable to be present at the meeting. In his submission, Councillor Chalkley welcomed the introduction of a Member Development Charter which he felt would help Members to become increasingly professional in undertaking their duties. Councillor Chalkley also indicated his support for the Council to achieve Charter Plus status equivalence.
- 4.9 The Chairman acknowledged that councillors roles varied considerably and their training needs differed. She highlighted the importance of Cabinet Members in needing to build up an extensive knowledge base in their field and working closely with officers, whilst those who chaired committees also required specific training. However, she remarked that a current backbencher councillor could become Leader or a Cabinet Member in future and it was also important that they had sufficient Member Development opportunities. The Chairman concurred that changes in legislation and policy meant that it was important that Members were kept updated on these through appropriate training. Member Development was also important to demonstrate that councillors are fit to represent the community and to be leaders, particularly as Members faced increased public scrutiny through the media, including ever widening social media channels. The Chairman also felt that the Standards Committee should play a greater role in helping to promote Member Development and a cross party task group could be created to look into this matter in future.
- 4.10 Hazel Best (Principal Solicitor) was invited to comment and she advised that it was not a legal requirement to have a Members' Development Charter, however it could be used as a benchmark and it also provided an opportunity to provide evidence of what the Council does to ensure councillors can effectively fulfil their roles.

4.11 **RESOLVED:**

That it be noted that the responsibility for Member Development sits with the Leader of the Council.

5 GUIDANCE ON USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY MEMBERS

- 5.1 Toby Howes (Senior Committee and Governance Officer) introduced the report that included Social Media Guidelines for Members that had been adopted by Wycombe District Council. The Committee was then invited to comment on these guidelines and to consider whether the Council should adopt a similar set of guidelines.
- 5.2 Councillor Boothroyd began by asking what action may be taken if a Member was to breach the guidelines. He stated that there needed to be a distinction between a Member commenting as a councillor as opposed to speaking in a personal capacity, which was often difficult to separate. The issue was further complicated by the fact that officers sometimes used social media too and this could even involve interaction with Members. Councillor Boothroyd stated that councillors were also at risk of being goaded by other users on social media because of their elected representative status. He suggested that a guidance note for Members could be produced to explain how their conduct on social media may be interpreted by the Code of Conduct
- 5.3 Councillor McAllister commented that she did not use social media, but if she were to, she would do so in a straightforward manner. Councillor Rigby suggested that a simple 'Do's and Don'ts' of using social media be produced for Member. He also emphasised the need for caution for Members when they used social media. Councillor Hyams welcomed Wycombe District Council's social media guidelines for Members and felt that it addressed all the issues together in one document. She also felt there needed to be an important distinction between using social media as a councillor and as an individual. The issue of online taunting of councillors from anonymous users also needed to be looked at and the Code of Conduct should state clearly that Members may not create their own anonymous accounts.
- 5.4 Councillor Caplan stated that consideration should first be given as to whether the Council's current Code of Conduct was sufficient to cover use of social media. Whilst Wycombe District Council's guidelines made some useful clarifications, there were duplications contained within it and efforts should be made to ensure this did not occur in the Council's own Code of Conduct. In his view, Councillor Caplan felt that the Code of Conduct did not distinguish between a Member acting as a councillor and in a personal capacity. He did not think that much needed to be added to the Code of Conduct in respect of use of social media, although he concurred that a simple set of rules would be useful.
- 5.5 Members noted the written comments submitted by Councillor Chalkley in which he stated that although the Wycombe District Council's guidelines lacked clarity in some areas, it acted as an ideal starting point for the Council to produce its own guidelines.
- 5.6 Sir Stephen Lamport commented that a statement on social media could potentially remain in permanent public view and Members needed to be mindful of this and it was a vulnerable area for them. He felt there would be some merit in putting together some guidelines for Members on use of social

media.

5.7 Hazel Best advised that there was also LGA guidance on use of social media for officers. She added that paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10 of the Council's Code of Conduct emphasised the value of respect that Members needed to demonstrate and this could also apply to use of social media.

5.8 The Chairman noted that a number of other local authorities were looking into use of social media by Members. She acknowledged the difficulty in separating a Member's comments on social media between that as a councillor and in a personal capacity. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that Members were aware of the seriousness of the situation if their conduct brought the Council into disrepute and this needed to be reinforced. The Committee agreed to her suggestion that further consideration be given to producing some guidelines on use of social media.

5.9 **RESOLVED:**

1. That Wycombe District Council's Social Media Guidelines for Members be noted.
2. That further consideration be given to the Council producing its own social media guidelines for Members.

6 WORK OPTIONS AND WORK PROGRAMME

6.1 The Chairman introduced the item and advised that the list of work options in the report included items that other Standards Committees had looked at. She suggested that Members would benefit from sessions on the role of the Council's quasi-judicial committees and that guidance on declaring gifts and hospitality would also be useful. The Committee agreed that Members rights of access and Member/Officer protocol be considered at future meetings.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

7.1 Toby Howes had advised that two people had been shortlisted for the Third Independent Person vacancy and that they would be informally interviewed by officers. Should any shortlisted candidate be considered suitable, they would then be interviewed formally by the General Purposes Committee, and if successful, recommended by the Council to be approved by Full Council.

The Meeting ended at 8.20 pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____