



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on Thursday 4 November 2021.

Members Present: Councillors Judith Warner (Chairman), Ian Adams, David Boothroyd, Louise Hyams, Patricia McAllister and Karen Scarborough

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Richard Beddoe and Asif Ibal MBE and Shajad Hussain (Independent Persons)

Also Present: Councillor Rachael Robathan and Elizabeth Walters (Independent Persons)

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Karen Scarborough was substituting for Councillor Richard Beddoe.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were none.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2021 be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

4 UPDATE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

- 4.1 Stuart Love, Chief Executive, addressed the Committee on the recent review undertaken on the Marble Arch Mound project. The Committee noted that the review had been presented to the Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee following which five recommendations had been agreed. One of these recommendations requested that the Standards Committee be asked to prioritise a review of the Member Officer Protocol.

- 4.2 The Committee was informed that the aim of the review was to strengthen the roles of officers and members in giving and receiving clear and independent advice whilst ensuring they continued to work together to innovate. The review had established that there was no evidence of any issues across the Council, but the review presented a good opportunity to review the protocol with a view to ensuing good working relationships and governance across the organisation.
- 4.3 The importance of the protocol was stressed as it formed the basis for the training and coaching provided to senior officers. Therefore, if the Committee agreed to the review, a process of reconsulting officers and members on the protocol would be undertaken by the Leader and the Monitoring Officer to ensure there was engagement from all parties. With elections scheduled for 2022 it was felt that this was a good opportunity to remind people of the protocol and work with them to strengthen it.
- 4.4 The Committee discussed the importance of the protocol and welcomed a review. The importance of officers being able to provide clear, independent advice to all members and ensuring that members received this advice was stressed and the Committee agreed the review was an opportunity to assist in building these constructive working relationships.

RESOLVED:

That a review of the Member/Officer Protocol be prioritised with a view to strengthening the role of officers and members in giving and receiving clear and independent advice.

5 ANNUAL 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 had 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 Chair welcomed Councillor Rachael Robathan, Leader of the Council, to the meeting. Committee members were invited to submit questions to Councillor Robathan on a range of ethical standards matters and the following areas were covered:
- Member/Officer Protocol – a review of the protocol was welcomed and was important in clearly defining the relationship between members and officers. It was essential that officers had the ability to challenge members and provide them with clear and independent advice. If an officer felt that advice was not being considered, then clear escalation procedures needed to be followed. It was also considered however that members should have the ability to robustly challenge officers, whilst respecting their integrity, and it was hoped the review would assist in ensuring there was a constructive officer/member working relationship.

- Member Addresses – It was recognised that members personal addresses were no longer publicly available on the Council’s website. The ability to withhold this information was considered important, especially in light of recent tragic events, as members often had to make decisions on very emotive areas. To address concerns over potential conflicts of interest a code of conduct was in place which all members had to adhere to, and this very clearly set out the standards expected of members and what their responsibilities were.
- Training – Members were required to attend a code of conduct training session usually conducted after an election. However, the suggestion that the training be delivered every year was welcomed along with the proposal to make it mandatory for all members.

5.3 The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council for attending the meeting. Councillor Robathan thanked the Committee for their work which she considered to be very important.

6 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

6.1 Hazel Best, Monitoring Officer, provided the Committee with an update on the Local Government Association’s (LGA) model code of conduct. The Committee had considered the model code of conduct issued by the LGA in December 2020 and consequently made several amendments to the Council’s code of conduct. Following this the LGA had subsequently updated their code of conduct to rectify some minor issues identified and these were now being presented to the Committee for information.

6.2 Due to the minor nature of the changes the Committee noted that it was not proposed to undertake a review of the Council’s code of conduct, however the document would be kept under review and any future changes considered necessary brought to the Committee for approval.

RESOLVED:

That the changes to the LGA model code of conduct be noted.

7 ANNUAL UPDATE ON MEMBER COMPLAINTS

7.1 Hazel Best, Monitoring Officer, introduced the annual report which provided details of complaints against members of the Council between September 2020 to October 2021. It was confirmed that during this period seven complaints had been received. The Committee was provided with an overview of the nature of the complaints

7.2 The Committee was interested to note that two of the complaints related to one Councillor’s posts on social media and this had triggered the code of conduct training session held in June 2021 with a focus on social media training. It was confirmed that planning for the code of conduct training

session had commenced and was scheduled to be held following the 2022 local elections. Following the Committee's discussions earlier members were pleased to note that part of the training would involve a focus on the Member/Officer Protocol.

RESOLVED:

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

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22 AND ACTION TRACKER

- 8.1 The Committee noted the 2021-22 Work Programme and was asked to consider any items they would like to come to future meetings.
- 8.2 Following discussions earlier the Committee agreed to include an item on the work programme relating to the review of the Member/Officer Protocol.

RESOLVED:

That the review of the Member/Officer Protocol be included on 2021-22 Work Programme.

The Meeting ended at 7.39 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____