

STANDARDS COMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday 10 June 2021 at 6.00 pm
Committee Room (B6) - Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton, London, SW2 1RW

Members Present: Councillor Scarlett O'Hara, Councillor Timothy Windle (Chair),
Councillor Pete Elliott and Councillor Jackie Meldrum

Apologies: Councillor Christopher Wellbelove

Co-optees present online: Sue Gower MBE and Shajad Hussain

1 Declarations of Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 February 2021 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3 Member Complaints Update

Andrew Pavlou, Principal Lawyer Governance, provided the Committee with an update on complaints received against members of the Council for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. It was noted that:

- The Monitoring Officer had received twenty-one complaints. Sixteen of these were made by residents against members and five were made by members against other members.
- All complaints had been investigated informally and had been resolved by the Monitoring Officer. The matters complained of had not met the Council's criteria to warrant a formal investigation.
- Social media had played a large part in relation to a number of complaints, with misunderstandings by members and residents about what was and what was not acceptable.

During the discussion various matters were considered in relation to dealing with, and reporting on, complaints received against members. Additional information was requested in relation to trends, satisfaction with the complaints process and comparing data with previous years. Officers explained these requests would be considered ahead of preparing the annual complaints report for 2021/22, although it was acknowledged that verifying satisfaction may be difficult.

It was highlighted that officers would continue to monitor the Members' Code of Conduct to

ensure it remained consistent with good practice and LGA guidance. It was explained that Members would receive training to ensure understanding and compliance with the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

4 Councillors' Guide to Handling Intimidation

Christian Scade, Deputy Democratic Services Manager, explained the report presented provided an opportunity for the Committee to review and reflect on recent Local Government Association (LGA) guidance in relation to handling intimidation.

It was noted that the LGA guidance covered a range of topics and was designed not to alarm, but to suggest steps that could be taken to protect those in a public position, including councillors, and ways to respond should an incident occur.

During the discussion a number of issues were considered, including general advice on handling intimidation, personal safety, social media, legislation that applied to intimidation, dealing with a variety of behaviours, balancing freedom of speech and its limitations, the roles and responsibilities of Councillors and details on how to communicate with residents, colleagues and officers.

To ensure existing and incoming Councillors were suitably briefed it was agreed that the extensive LGA guidance should be broken down into bite size themes covering social media, personal safety and security, and dealing with a variety of different behaviours. A request was made for specific training for councillors in relation to helping residents with drug, alcohol and mental health problems. It was noted that existing members would be invited to take part in a discussion on handling intimidation and that this would be used to help develop the May 2022 Member Learning and Development Induction Programme.

RESOLVED That the guidance from the Local Government Association, in relation to handling intimidation, be noted and the actions highlighted above, in relation to member learning and development, be supported.

5 Work Programme 2021/22

The report presented provided information on the proposed Standards Committee work programme for 2021/22. Officers highlighted the following points:

- The Committee was responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors and non-elected co-opted representatives.
- Although there was not a requirement for the Committee to have a work programme it was considered good practice to have one as it helped to demonstrate work being done by the Committee through the year.

During the discussion the importance of possible changes to the Members' Code of Conduct and the protocol on councillor and officer relations were highlighted. It was agreed that an item on member learning and development, including guidance on handling intimidation and plans for the May 2022 induction, should be considered in draft by the Committee in November 2021.

RESOLVED That, subject to an item on member learning and development being considered by Committee in November 2021, the proposed work programme for 2021/22 be approved.

The meeting ended at 6.36 pm

CHAIR
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Tuesday 9 November 2021

Date of Despatch: Tuesday 20 July 2021

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