

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 9 July 2019

Present:

Councillor Will Harmer (Chairman)
Councillor Vanessa Allen (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Melanie Stevens and Councillor Stephen Wells

12 TO APPOINT A CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR 2019/20

Councillor Will Harmer and Councillor Vanessa Allen were appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the 2019/20 Council year.

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Michael Tickner and Dr Simon Davey.

14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd January 2019 be confirmed.

16 QUESTIONS

No questions had been received.

17 MONITORING OFFICER'S GENERAL REPORT

Report CSD19098

The Committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer setting out a number of issues for consideration. The Independent Person, Dr Simon Davey, had sent in some comments on the report which were tabled for consideration.

(A) Independent Persons

The Committee received an update on progress with recruiting additional Independent Persons. Advertisements earlier in the year had failed to attract any applications; Members proposed advertising in a wider range of locations and suggested looking amongst different categories of potential recruits, such

as honorary aldermen, religious groups and residents associations, although it was a requirement that Independent Persons should not be actively engaged in politics or local campaigning.

Members also suggested that the advertisement could be made more attractive and direct.

(B) Committee for Standards in Public Life - Local Government Ethical Standards Report (January 2019)

The report of the Committee for Standards in Public Life on “Local Government Ethical Standards” had been published on 30th January 2019. The report reflected the Committee’s concerns that there was a lack of effective sanctions in the current standards regime, other than the criminal sanctions relating to Declarable pecuniary Interests. The Committee for Standards in Public Life made 26 formal recommendations, most of which were addressed to government and required legislation, but also proposed 15 “best practice” recommendations which could be implemented by local authorities. One of the recommendations (25) was that party groups at local and national level should require that formal induction training be compulsory, and a Member considered that compulsion was not a helpful approach. It was proposed that work on the best practice recommendations in the Committee’s report be fed into a wider review of the Council’s Code of Conduct.

Members discussed the requirement that their home addresses be published on the Council website as part of their Declaration of Interest. These addresses could be taken down temporarily if there was a genuine threat to a Councillor or their family, but otherwise this was a clear statutory requirement.

The Committee discussed how high ethical standards could be promoted beyond the formal realm of Council meetings at group meetings. This was an area where group leaders could be effective in encouraging good practice and integrity of decision making.

The peer review of Bromley’s planning committees by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) had made reference to the Standards Committee’s role on monitoring and advising on training of planning committee members. It was noted that a report on the recommendations arising from the Review was expected to be considered by the Development Control Committee at its meeting on 23rd July 2019. The Chairman offered to speak to the Chairman of Development Control Committee before their meeting, and a special meeting of this Committee could be called if necessary. Members requested that the PAS Report be circulated to the Committee members.

Bromley’s Code of Conduct was based on a model code proposed by the Department for Communities and Local Government following the Localism Act 2011. Bromley had voluntarily opted to require that a range of non-pecuniary interests should be declared, even though there was no statutory requirement, but Bromley had never required the interests of close family members or associates to be registered.

The Committee considered that the Code of Conduct should be reviewed, taking into account the best practice suggestions from the Committee for Standards in Public Life, with a view to an updated Code being ready for the 2020/21 Council year. It was suggested that the Director of Corporate Services should produce a new draft Code by mid-September, so that there was time for consultation with the party groups before a report was brought to the Committee's next meeting on 31st October 2019.

RESOLVED that a revised Code of Conduct be prepared for the Committee's next meeting on 31st October 2019, and the Director of Corporate Services be requested to bring forward draft proposals to allow for informal consideration by the party groups in advance of this.

(C) Dispensations granted

Dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer were noted (Appendix 2 to the report).

(D) Gifts and Hospitality Register

The report set out declarations of gifts or hospitality received since the last meeting (Appendix 3 to the report.)

(E) Register of Interests

The Register of Interests was available for inspection.

(F) Substitution

Substitution was not allowed at the Committee, and the Monitoring Officer explained the reasons for this, which the majority of the Committee accepted.

(G) Work Programme and Matters Outstanding

The Committee considered its work programme for future meetings. Dr Davey had suggested a number of people to invite to future meetings - party group leaders, the Chief Executive, the Head of Audit, and the Monitoring Officer. The Head of Audit had attended a recent meeting, and the Monitoring Officer was always present, but the Committee was keen to hear from the Chief Executive and from group leaders.

(H) Whistle-blowing Procedures

More detail on the Council's whistle-blowing procedures had been submitted (in the part 2 agenda), including details of recent cases. Members were informed that there were a variety of ways for people to complain that were not defined as whistle-blowing.

(I) Complaints

The Committee received a summary of recent complaints made against Councillors.

18 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS SUBSEQUENTLY AMENDED

RESOLVED that the Press and public be excluded during consideration of the items of business referred to below as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the Press and public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

**The following summaries
refer to matters
involving exempt information**

19 MONITORING OFFICER'S GENERAL REPORT: APPENDICES

The Committee considered part 2 appendices containing details of whistleblowing cases and complaints received against individual councillors since the last meeting on 22nd January 2019.

The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm

Chairman