

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee on Monday 2 March 2020

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Committee members present:

Councillor Aziz (Chair)

Councillor Pressel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Gotch

Councillor Kennedy

Councillor Taylor

Councillor Simm

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer

Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager

Also present:

Osama Raja, Independent Person, Independent Person

Andrew Mills-Hicks, Independent Person, Independent Person

Parish Councillor Dorian Hancock, Parish Council representative / non-voting member

Apologies:

Independent Persons Chris Ballinger and Jill McCleery sent apologies.

16. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

17. Code of Conduct: summary of complaints and individual dispensations - 30 September 2019 to 31 January 2020

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report. There had been no complaints that councillors had breached the Members' Code of Conduct in the period covered by the report.

The Monitoring Officer drew the Committee's attention to the one dispensation that had been granted to an individual councillor. In the circumstances set out in paragraphs 8-14 of the report it had only been possible to consult with an Independent Person after the event. The Independent Person had retrospectively agreed with the steps taken by the Monitoring Officer and the granting of the dispensation. The Independent Person had also said they would have been more concerned if in requesting an individual dispensation a councillor was seeking to influence the outcome or garner favour, which had not been the case here.

In discussion the Committee noted that:

- There is a need for clear guidance for councillors who are landlords or tenants if and when the matter of selective licensing comes before councillors again because councillors' individual property interests would stand to be impacted by any future decisions on a scheme.
- Where a councillor does not follow the advice of the Monitoring Officer in respect of councillors' interests this can create uncertainty for other councillors.
- This had been the first request for an individual dispensation within the last two years.
- The process for agreeing individual dispensations did not fit well with the circumstances of this case in practice. This should be subject to further consideration in the next review of the Council's Constitution.
- All councillors must declare their property interests within the city in their Register of Interests and keep their Register of Interests up to date.

The Committee resolved to note the content of the report and the learning point identified.

18. Member training and development scheme 2020/24

The Head of Law and Governance introduced the report which built on existing good practice and represented the outcome of previous input by the Standards Committee as well as feedback from councillors and officers. The Draft Training and Development Scheme (attached as Appendix 1) was intended to support newly elected councillors to become effective in their role as early as possible while not overloading them. Code of Conduct training would be compulsory for all councillors on a biennial rather than an annual basis, reflecting the positive culture of the Council and the fact that councillor conduct has not been a significant issue. There was an expanded programme of optional training which included role specific training and a focus on emerging issues such as personal safety and social media. The Scheme also granted discretion to the Head of Law and Governance to agree where councillors were not required to attend compulsory training by exception.

The Committee thanked officers for their work in drawing up a comprehensive training scheme and in discussion noted that:

- The offer of personal safety training for existing members and election candidates was welcome.
- It could be difficult to get some councillors to recognise the value in being trained so there was a need to think about how to position the training with councillors.
- All election candidates would be informed of the key training dates and what to expect in their early weeks in office, if elected. The Head of Law and Governance would also be meeting with candidates and agents.
- Safeguarding training was vital and should be compulsory on an annual [~~or biennial~~¹] basis. Issues of coercive control came up regularly in different scenarios (e.g. domestic violence, county lines drug trafficking, child sexual exploitation) and councillors should be trained on how to recognise and report safeguarding concerns.

¹ Minutes corrected at meeting on 29 June 2020

- Online safety was similarly important and would be picked up in social media training.
- Scrutiny training was very important and should include a focus on good scrutiny outcomes from other councils. Consideration should also be given to training to Scrutiny members collectively as well as individually.
- The frequency of compulsory licensing training reflected the significant impacts of decisions taken by councillors on peoples' livelihoods.
- While there were many clear benefits in attending face to face training, there would be merit in officers exploring whether some training could be made available online, for example by utilising the training resources of partner organisations.
- It would be helpful if acronyms were explained in reports.

The Standards Committee resolved to:

1. Endorse the Draft Member Training and Development Scheme 2020-24 subject to:
 - i. the requirements for and frequency of safeguarding training being increased,
 - ii. the inclusion of a focus on domestic violence and other issues of coercive control within safeguarding training,
 - iii. further exploration of options for online training delivery;
2. Note the arrangements for buddying;
3. Note the arrangements for offering personal safety training and guidance to members and election candidates.

19. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2019 as a true and accurate record.

20. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted that the next meeting is scheduled for 29 June 2020.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.45 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 29 June 2020