

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee on Thursday 14 November 2024

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Committee members present:

Councillor Snowton	Councillor Diggins (Chair)
Councillor Djafari-Marbini	Councillor Harley
Councillor Robinson	Councillor Waite (Vice-Chair)

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services

Also present:

Andrew Mills-Hicks, Independent Person, Independent Person non-voting

Apologies:

Councillor Pressel sent apologies.
Substitutes are shown above.

The Committee elected Councillor Diggins as Chair and Councillor Waite as Vice-Chair.

7. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Susanna Pressel sent apologies and sent Councillor Railton to act as her representative.

8. Declarations of Interest

None.

9. Code of Conduct: summary of complaints and individual dispensations - 1 July 2023 until 31 October 2024

Councillor Diggins presented the report and noted the content of the report.

Councillor Harley asked if the 12 complaints in the report had been made by different people or if they had been made by the same person. Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance, responded that each complaint came from separate individuals, though some complaints related to the same Councillor.

Councillor Harley asked about references in paragraphs 4.5 and 6 regarding the impartiality of Council officers and asked for further information about these complaints.

The Head of Law and Governance responded that each complaint is slightly different. However, the reference in the report quotes the code of conduct which concerns Councillors not impeding or challenging the impartiality of officers.

Councillor Diggins asked about the complaints concerning the social media platform X. She asked how these complaints fell under the Councillor code of conduct. The Head of Law and Governance responded that a Councillor can be found in violation for their actions on social media if it is clear that the councillor was acting in their capacity as a Councillor during their actions on social media. If a Councillor is not acting in their capacity as a councillor when posting on social media, then their actions may not fall under the code of conduct.

Councillor Snowton asked about the complaint wherein there had been a recommendation to take action. He asked if that action had been taken. The Head of Law and Governance said that the action had been taken.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini asked about the actions of Councillors on social media. She said that whether Councillors are posting in a personal or professional capacity, they will always be known as a Councillor. With this in mind, she asked if their actions on social media should always be covered by the code of conduct.

The Head of Law and Governance said that actions on social media are assumed to be personal views. For Councillors, this goes back to a piece of case law, which concerns what a person perceives as the capacity of their actions. For example, a Councillor could share something that is considered inappropriate, but it is not necessarily punishable under the code of conduct. However, if they share something inappropriate about a community matter which they are politically connected to or a fellow Councillor, then it falls under the code of conduct.

In response to a question from Councillor Djafari-Marbini, the Head of Law and Governance said that if a Councillor posts about something that is connected to their work as a Councillor, then it is likely to fall under the code of conduct. A further example of this would be if a Councillor is leaving the Town Hall and they shout at a fellow Councillor, they could assume that the first Councillor is acting in their capacity as a Councillor. However, if this occurred in a pub, the same assumption may not be made. The context is central to a determination of whether something falls under the code of conduct.

The Committee agreed the recommendations of the report.

10. Appointment of Independent Persons in 2024/2025

Councillor Diggins noted the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini asked what the time commitment for the work on the interview panel would be. The Head of Law and Governance responded that it depends on the number of applications they receive, but not that any interview would not last for more than an hour. She added that interviews would be held online.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini volunteered to serve on the interview panel and the Committee supported her appointment to this panel.

The Committee noted the report and appointed Councillor Djafari-Marbini to work on the interview panel, as required in the report.

11. Member Training Update

Councillor Diggins noted the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Smowton asked if they had another session for the Councillor code of conduct training scheduled.

The Head of Law and Governance responded that they don't have a date yet, but that they will get one organized as soon as possible. At this point, this will likely be in the new year. She said that she would look at the calendar and circulate possible dates to members in due course. She pointed out the training which had recently been shared with members, regarding ICT and Health and Safety. She said that this falls within the standards for Councillor training and is not about member development, but it is best practice training for the wellbeing of the Council as an organization. She acknowledged that there were issues in how this training was communicated to members and she said that they will make sure that these issues don't happen again in future. She emphasized that they do need councillors to undertake these trainings.

Councillor Diggins commented on the availability of trainings during the evening hours. She said that there was often only one evening training available for member training sessions, and that this creates issues for Councillors who work other jobs during the day.

The Head of Law and Governance said that she would gauge Councillors availability for trainings in the near future and see if the timings of training sessions need to be adjusted. She agreed that the matter raised by Councillor Diggins is a common issue that other Councillors had also brought to her attention.

The Committee noted the report and approved the report's recommendations.

12. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting held of 10 July 2023.

13. Dates of future meetings

The Committee is scheduled to meet at 6.00pm on the following dates:

- 11 March 2025
- 07 July 2025
- 13 November 2025

The meeting started at Time Not Specified and ended at Time Not Specified

Chair
2025

Date: Tuesday 11 March

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal
decision notice is issued*

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.