

Minutes of a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE on Monday 21 October 2019

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Committee members:

Councillor Aziz (Chair)

Councillor Pressel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Gotch

Councillor Kennedy

Councillor Taylor

Councillor Simm

Officers:

Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer

Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager

Catherine Phythian, Committee Services Officer

Also present:

Jill McCleery (Independent Person)

Apologies:

Chris Ballinger sent apologies.

The Chair (Cllr Aziz) had sent apologies for lateness and in her absence the Vice-Chair (Cllr Pressel) assumed the Chair and opened the meeting.

10. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

11. Code of Conduct: summary of complaints and individual dispensations - 31 May 2019 until 30 September 2019

The Monitoring Officer presented the information report on the number of complaints received under the Members' Code of Conduct and the number of dispensations to an individual member, granted under Section 33 of the 2011 Localism Act.

The Monitoring Officer referred the Committee to paragraphs 4 to 8 of the report which summarised the single complaint (reference 15202) that had been settled through informal resolution since 31 May 2019. The Monitoring Officer considered that the case did give rise to a wider learning point: that if a member introduced themselves or presented themselves as a councillor to a member of the public then the Code of Conduct would be engaged even if the context of that introduction was not in any way related to the business of the City Council. This learning point would be included in future Code of Conduct training.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that no requests for individual dispensations had been received.

On a related point the Committee asked the Monitoring Officer to clarify the rules on declarations by members of the planning committees if they were employees of the University of Oxford or Oxford Brookes University in respect of planning applications from either of those institutions. The Monitoring Officer explained that this was a matter of personal choice for the member(s) concerned and that there was no requirement in law to make such a declaration unless the nature of the employment had a direct influence on the substance of the application. This view was supported by case law relating to the City Council's consideration of a University of Oxford application.

The Monitoring Officer said that she would be circulating written advice on this point to all members of Council.

The Standards Committee resolved to note the report.

Councillor Aziz arrived at the end of this item.

12. Review of Member training in Quarter 2 2019/20

Councillor Aziz assumed the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

The Monitoring Officer presented the report which detailed the programme of training delivered to members in Q2 2019/20.

The Committee discussion centred on the low attendance levels for member briefings and some of the optional training sessions and considered what measures could be introduced to improve member attendance. The Committee felt that there was a role for the leadership within the political groups to promote and encourage attendance by their members, especially in relation to courses provided by external trainers.

It was recognised that there had been several briefing sessions offered over recent months and that the low attendance levels might be due to over exposure. The Committee and Member Services team were asked to review the scheduling and content of the regular member briefing sessions.

The Standards Committee resolved to note the review of the programme of training delivered to members in Q2 2019/20.

13. Member training - Agreement of principles for the 2020-24 member training scheme

Member Development

The Committee was supportive of the view that it had a role to play in identifying members' development needs and shaping a member training programme to enable all

elected representatives to meet the challenges facing them and to support their work in committee, in their ward and in Council in the 2020s.

The Committee acknowledged that its members should work within their political groups to encourage and promote the importance and benefit of all training, not just that relating to ethical standards, amongst their colleagues.

Compulsory training

The Committee considered that Code of Conduct, Planning and Licencing training should be compulsory training for councillors and that the following topics might be added to the list of compulsory training:

- Finance (to provide an introduction to local authority finances, the budget process and medium term financial plan)
- Safeguarding
- Ethical Values and Behaviours (to include issues such as equality and diversity, unconscious bias, anti-Semitism, misogyny)

The Committee acknowledged the risks associated with introducing too large a programme of compulsory training but felt that all of the topics identified were of sufficient importance to be included in a compulsory training programme.

The Committee then considered the frequency and scheduling of a compulsory training programme. They felt that the current arrangement of compulsory training on planning every 2 years was reasonable but that the frequency of compulsory training on Code of Conduct (currently annual) could be reduced. Consideration should be given to the proposal that all councillors (whether newly elected or re-elected) should only receive each of the compulsory training modules in their first year of office. Recognition should also be given to those councillors who brought transferrable skills and experience from their professional life or other roles in community or public service.

Non-compulsory training

The Committee suggested that non-compulsory training should be offered to all councillors on an annual basis. These sessions should:

- meet any identified behavioural or cultural issues and any skills gaps
- address any new or emerging issues of relevance to the Council
- provide specialist knowledge on particular themes (e.g. within planning) that built on the information provided as part of the compulsory programme

Induction

The Committee recognised the importance of induction training in setting the culture of the Council and the behaviours of councillors and agreed that the induction programme should be compulsory. The Committee was satisfied that the revised format and scheduling for the induction sessions that had been introduced in 2018 should be replicated in 2020 – 2024.

The Committee asked officers to review the “induction” arrangements for a member elected as a result of a by-election to ensure that, as far as possible, it reflected the standard programme.

Buddying

The Committee considered that the informal buddying arrangements between newly elected councillors and members of the Committee and Member Services team had been a constructive initiative which complemented any mentoring arrangements within the political groups. The Committee confirmed that the arrangements should be in place for newly elected councillors in May 2020.

14. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee resolved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 June 2019 as a true and accurate record.

15. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates of the future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.15 pm

Chair

Date: