

## **MINUTES OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2019**

### **Present:**

Councillor Taylor (in the Chair)

Councillors

Benson

Wing

### **In Attendance:**

Mrs Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance

Mr Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships/ Monitoring Officer

Mrs Bernadette Jarvis, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser

### **Also Present:**

Ms Helen Broughton – Independent Person

### **1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no interests declared on this occasion.

### **2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2018**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **3 STANDARDS UPDATE REPORT**

Mr Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships/ Monitoring Officer, provided an update report on standards issues and recent training undertaken on behaviours. He advised on the requirement to report to the Standards Committee periodically on all issues brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer. He went on to explain the role of the Monitoring Officer as the designated proper officer with delegated authority to consider allegations of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and to determine if a matter required investigation.

The process for dealing with matters brought to the Monitoring Officer was explained, with the emphasis on seeking informal resolution where possible. Mr Towers referred to the categories used for reporting purposes which were broadly aligned to the general obligations of the Code of Conduct and had been designed for the purposes of identifying recurring themes and key areas for potential training opportunities. He provided an update on the standards issues raised since the last report to Committee based on the identified categories which were centred around bringing office into disrepute and treating others with respect. All issues had been dealt with either informally or with no further action taken.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr Towers confirmed that information on the Employee Assistance Programme was available to provide support to Elected

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Members in the event of a complaint or for any of life's challenges and was not just for counselling in the event of a crisis. The telephone helpline was there to help with any work or non-work related issue. Information was displayed in the Members' group rooms and the Members Training Room.

Mr Towers referred to the code of conduct and behaviours training that had been provided to the Standards Committee prior to the meeting and the intention to undertake similar training sessions with other Elected Members. Provisional dates for the training had been scheduled for 26 September and 17 October and Mr Towers asked for the Committee's endorsement of the roll-out of the behaviour training.

**Resolved:**

To note the update report and the issues raised to date and support the roll out of the training on behaviours.

### 4 STANDARDS UPDATE REPORT

Mrs Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance/ Deputy Monitoring Officer, reported on the findings of Committee on Standards in Public Life review of local government ethical standards. The review covered all local authorities in England, including parish councils and examined the structures and processes in place for maintaining codes of conduct for local councillors, investigating alleged breaches of the code, sanctions for misconduct and managing conflicts of interest. A consultation had also been undertaken as part of the review.

Following a workshop held with representatives from Blackpool and Fylde Borough Councils a joint response on behalf of both Councils had been submitted as part of the consultation. The main area that had been highlighted at the workshop related to the imposition of stronger sanctions to deal with certain areas of misconduct. Members also considered that having a model code of conduct would be beneficial to ensure consistency across Councils.

The outcome of the review had been published earlier in the year and an Executive Summary of the Local Government Ethical Standards Review had been attached as an appendix to the report, with the full report accessible via the below link:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-ethical-standards-report>

Mrs Hurst referred to the main recommendations of the review as set out in the report. These included the key recommendation that local authorities be given the power to suspend councillors without allowances for up to six months for significant or recurring breaches, with a right of appeal. Mrs Hurst went on to report on the other recommendations which included revised rules on declaring interests and gifts and hospitality, a voluntary Model Code of Conduct and a fixed term of appointment of Independent Persons and a strengthening of the role. Further recommendations related to the provision of adequate resources, training and support to Monitoring Officers, greater transparency for reporting and publishing Code of Conduct issues and the setting of clear behavioural expectations by political groups and mandatory training of Elected Members. The Committee noted that some of the recommendations would require legislation and that a response from Government in relation to these recommendations was currently awaited.

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Mrs Hurst referred the Committee to the appendix to the report that set out the best practice recommendations which local authorities could implement without the need for legislation. The Committee considered each recommendation in turn and Mrs Hurst elaborated further on the Monitoring Officer's initial comments on each of the recommendations. It was noted that some of the recommendations were already in place, such as the number of Independent Persons which currently exceeded the recommendation and the existence of reciprocal investigation agreements between Blackpool and Fylde Borough Councils. The updating of the gifts and hospitality register was also in place, although it was accepted that further work was required on the format of the information presented. In relation to the other recommendations it was noted that some could be implemented immediately whilst others would benefit from collaborative working with Fylde Borough Council. Mrs Hurst also referred to the recommendation regarding the publication of information for the Council's companies, reminding the Committee that for some of the companies that were limited by shares their minutes and agendas contained commercially sensitive data which could not be published.

The Committee questioned how collaboration with Fylde Borough Council would work in practice and Mrs Hurst explained the intention to hold a joint informal workshop to agree a broad set of principles that could be informed by a future model code, which would then be brought back to each respective Council's Standards Committee for approval. Responding to further questions regarding the potential for one of the Councils not to agree to adopt a particular recommendation, Mr Towers highlighted the benefit of having similar broad principles, particularly in view of the shared reciprocal investigation agreements and the same Independent Persons appointed for both Councils.

### **Resolved:**

1. To note the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and its recommendations.
2. To agree that the Monitoring Officer liaises with the Monitoring Officer at Fylde Borough Council, other Monitoring Officers as appropriate and the three Independent Persons in respect of implementing the best practice recommendations and report on progress at the next meeting.
3. To agree to the implementation of the best practice recommendations that did not require collaboration with Fylde Borough Council.

### **4 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as 19 November 2019 to be held in Committee Room A, Town Hall, Blackpool.

### **Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 6.27 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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