

MINUTES OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING - TUESDAY, 19 APRIL 2022

Present:

Councillor Benson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Baker

Clapham

Collett

Smith

In Attendance:

Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships / Monitoring Officer

Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance / Deputy Monitoring Officer

Jenni Cook, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 20 MAY 2021

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2021 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3 STANDARDS UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered a report from the Monitoring Officer which provided an update on standards issues and training held since the last update at the December 2020 meeting of the Standards Committee.

Four standards issues had been raised since December 2020 and one of these had been the subject of a Hearing held in May 2021. In respect of the other issues, the Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the low incidences of standards complaints could be partly attributed to Covid-19 lockdowns and were in line with other authorities across the county. In addition no patterns of behaviour or causes of complaints had been identified.

In respect of training, the Committee was informed that social media training had been carried out by a specified provider over two sessions in June 2021 with 18 attendees. The feedback received from the sessions had been disappointing and another provider would be sought as part of the future training programme.

Conflict management training had been held in July 2021 and February 2021. The feedback received for this training had been very positive in terms of content and delivery style. It was proposed that the sessions should be repeated and would be useful for any new Councillors elected in May 2023.

The Standards Committee discussed the update and the feedback received on the social media and conflict management training. Those present that had attended the social media session suggested that future sessions should include advice on pitfalls of using social media and how councillors can take steps to protect themselves.

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Resolved:

1. To note the report and the issues raised to date.
2. To support the repeat of the social media and conflict management training as part of the induction process for new councillors following the 2023 elections.

4 REVISED CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer outlined the report which asked the Standards Committee to consider a revised Code of Conduct for Members and to recommend it to Council for approval.

Workshops had taken place with the Independent Persons and the Standards Committee Members for both Blackpool Council and Fylde Council to consider the model Code of Conduct which had been produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2021. The workshops had identified that while the Council's current Code was fit for purpose, the model Code provided useful explanatory information and a revised Code had been drafted based upon that feedback along with clarification with regards to gifts and hospitality, in line with the recommendations from the Standards Committee meeting held in May 2021. Once the Code had been approved by Council, a programme of training would be implemented from the Autumn for existing councillors and for any new councillors following the May 2023 elections.

Resolved:

1. To recommend that Council approves the revised Code of Conduct for Members for inclusion in the Council's Constitution.
2. To agree that training on the revised Code of Conduct will be arranged following formal approval by Council and that Standards Committee members will champion this within their respective political groups.

5 GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE REPORT

The Monitoring Officer outlined the report which provided an overview of the Government's response to the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) review of local government ethical standards. The Standards Committee had last received an update on the CSPL review in September 2019, which was the first full review that had taken place since implementation of the Localism Act in 2011.

The Council had a strong relationship with Fylde Council and representatives from both Standards Committees had indicated that they favoured stronger sanctions to deal with appropriate areas of misconduct. The Monitoring Officer summarised the Government's response to the recommendations made in the CPSL report and noted that whilst was currently no intention to reinstate stronger sanctions, the Government would engage with sector representatives to 'seek views on options to strengthen sanctions to address breaches of the Code which fall below the bar of criminal activity but involve serious incidents of bullying and harassment or disruptive behaviour.' This intention was welcomed as this was the area where stronger sanctions would be more effective.

The Committee discussed the report and expressed disappointment with the lack of action regarding sanctions. It was noted however that with robust training and support,

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this would have a positive effect on behaviour and hopefully more compliance with the code of conduct.

Resolved:

To note the Government's response.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Standards Committee would be subject to ratification of the Programme of Meetings 2022/23 at Annual Council.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 6.17 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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