

MINUTES OF MEETING Standards Committee HELD ON Tuesday, 5th October, 2021, 7pm.

PRESENT:

Councillors: Felicia Opoku (Chair), Barbara Blake, Vincent Carroll and Erdal Dogan

ALSO ATTENDING: Fiona Alderman – Head of Legal and Governance and Ayshe Simsek Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager

18. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred to the notice of filming at meetings as set out at Item 1 and members noted this information.

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Ogiehor.

20. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no new items of urgent business.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest put forward.

22. MINUTES

RESOLVED

To approve the public minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on the 29th of June 2021 and the public minutes of the Standards Sub Assessment Committee held on the 26th of July 2021.

23. BRIEFING PAPER ON DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PERSONAL SAFETY FOR COUNCILLORS

The Committee considered the attached report responding to a request from the Chair and Committee members to explore consideration of the requirement to divulge a Councillor's home address on the Councillor Register of Interest form published on the Council's website. There was a longstanding Committee concern about Councillors personal safety from having this information on the website.

The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager advised that the report provided the background to how the code of conduct was developed. It further set out the reasons for Councillors requiring to declare their home address details on their Register of Interest. The report further detailed the provision in Section 32 of the Localism Act 2011 on sensitive interests. This provision allowed Councillors to apply to the Monitoring Officer to have their home address details withheld, if this could lead to them being subject to violence or harassment.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that there had been a sympathetic stance from Monitoring Officers, over the last couple of years, when considering applications for the home address to be withheld as a sensitive interest. There had been a number of requests put forward that had been granted.

The Committee noted that since consideration of a previous report on this matter, 18 months ago, there had not been any changes to the legislation and the requirement for Councillors to declare their home address on their Register of Interest when taking office remained. There had been a recent change to elections legislation; now not requiring prospective Councillor candidates to include their home address on the ballot paper for elections but this had not been taken forward in respect of Councillor Home addresses on Register of Interest forms.

There was LGA guidance, recently issued in June 2021, providing advice on handling intimidation and keeping safe for Councillors and MP's. This was attached and provided some good practical advice.

The Chair felt that it would be useful to look at what other London boroughs had done in relation to Councillor safety and whether there was a blanket agreement to have addresses withheld from Councillor Register of Interests. However, the Committee discussed the need to treat concerns individually and the Monitoring Officer's sympathetic stance was recognised and welcomed. This could have been set out more explicitly in the report. A member of the Committee expressed that they had experienced this sympathetic stance and had provided the necessary information in their application to the Monitoring Officer and had not been required to meet a high threshold evidence base for proving they met the criteria of the sensitive interest.

The Monitoring Officer explained that it would be difficult to explain a blanket approach of not including Councillor addresses as there would be Councillors that did want their addresses included for the reasons of openness and transparency. Dealing with requests on individual case-by-case basis was the recommended way forward.

A further member concurred with this, and commented on how residents liked the concept of their Councillor being local and being in contact with them. It was sensible for Councillors to have their own safety measures in place such as making sure that if going on a visit, there was awareness of this by a colleague/ family member and understanding provided of how long the visit was expected to take.

Agreed that there was not a need to have report back on this matter, outlining the boroughs that withheld the addresses of all their Councillors. A Committee Member

offered to email the two Councils that he was aware of that withheld their Councillor's home addresses to the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

24. BRIEFING PAPER ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The Committee considered a report highlighting recent developments in the ethical standards of elected officials that might be of interest to members of the Standards Committee in its role of promoting and maintaining high standard of conduct. There were also some case studies shared of complaint outcomes that was useful for the Committee's wider knowledge. This information could be considered by the Committee on a periodical basis if felt helpful.

The Committee agreed that the information had been useful and interesting to note. A member commented on the cases where there had been a fine line between the outcomes possible and the importance of getting advice and talking through any potential interests that could affect your decision making as a Councillor at an early stage.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.
2. To continue to receive this report on a periodical basis.

25. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Noted that a report on the Independent Persons appointment would need to be considered at the January meeting. This was currently a 2 year appointment and there was a need to consider a report with some options on the next steps.

There would be an early report on Member's Allowances for 2022/23 year, including any new guidance from London Councils, if published by this date.

Noted that the meeting on the 28th of Feb was earlier than usual due to the pre – election period and meetings stopping on the 18th of March. This included items on Member Allowances, appointment of Independent Persons, annual report on complaints and any required constitutional changes.

The Chair commented on having a report on suggested updates to the Member Code of Conduct, and considering what may need to be added . This could include recent updates to the social media policy and this could include the Committee providing advice on what key information to include in training for new cohort of Councillors.

26. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

27. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was noted that items 11-12 contained exempt information as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1985); paras 1 & 2; namely information relating to any individual and information likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of items 15-17 as they contained exempt information as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1985); paras 1 & 2; namely information relating to any individual and information likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

28. EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED

1. To approve the exempt minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on the 29th June 2021.
2. To approve the exempt minutes of the Standards Sub Assessment Committee on the 26th of July 2021.

29. NEW ITEMS OF EXEMPT URGENT BUSINESS

None

CHAIR: Councillor Felicia Opoku

Signed by Chair

Date