

MINUTES OF MEETING Standards Committee HELD ON Tuesday, 25th January, 2022, 7pm – 8.30pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Felicia Opoku (Chair), Vincent Carroll and Peter Mitchell

ALSO ATTENDING: Minesh Jani, Fiona Alderman, Stephen Lawrence Orumwense, Ayshe Simsek

30. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred to the notice of filming at meetings and Members noted this information.

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Barbara Blake and Cllr Ogiehor.

32. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no new items of urgent business.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest put forward.

34. MINUTES

RESOLVED

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 5 October as a correct record.

35. ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY (INCLUDING BRIBERY)

The Committee considered the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy to increase its awareness of the Council's attitude and approach on this key governance area. The Strategy provided guidance to relevant individuals, employees, Councillors, members of the public and organisations working in partnership with the Council, on the Council's stance on Fraud and Corruption and the steps people should take if they suspect fraud and corruption. The strategy also set out how the Council would deal with any allegations.

The Head of Audit and Risk presented and explained the content of attached appendices [Fraud Response Plan, Whistleblowing Policy, Sanctions Policy, Anti

Money Laundering Policy, and Anti Bribery Policy]. These documents were under review and were scheduled to be presented to the Corporate Committee in July 2022.

The Committee noted the Council had a zero tolerance to fraud and corruption and would use the full range of sanctions to act against individuals or organisations, found to be committing fraud against the Council.

The Committee noted that the Council's Anti-fraud and Corruption Strategy and the related appendices were published on the Haringey website and intranet site. In addition, all policies were published separately to enable anyone searching for the individual policy to locate these easily. The website pages also provided details of how to report suspected cases of fraud and corruption.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following information was provided:

- There was a need for the Council to be satisfied that the money flowing to the Council was through legitimate means. In addition, any significant sum of monies being paid into the Council would always need to be checked that from a legitimate source.
- The above applied to property transactions/tenant and landlord relationship. The Committee noted example of a property situation provided, where a property had been left without ownership and a significant sum of funds found, the Council had been obliged to investigate the potential source of these funds as it was not in keeping with the economic profile of the resident.
- Noted that the threshold of £10k as a cash payment ,without requirement to provide information on the sources of funds, was the standard threshold applied by most local authorities and financial organisations. However, the Head of Audit acknowledged, it was prudent reflecting on this amount, in light of the decreased accessibility to cash following Covid pandemic . This issue could be considered in the review of the policy which would be considered at Corporate Committee in July.
- Noted that there were patterns of behaviours associated with money laundering and fraud which staff were trained to understand and identify. The main areas related to tenancy fraud and right to buy.
- Noted that there was a new online learning course for staff on the Fraud and Bribery Act and agreed that it would be useful for Councillors to have access to this online module. Councillors currently had access to two eLearning modules on GDPR and Cyber security.[Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager to action]

RESOLVED

To note the Corporate Anti-fraud and Corruption Strategy together with the appended Fraud Response Plan, Whistle-blowing Policy, Sanctions Policy, Anti-money Laundering Policy and the Anti-bribery Policy.

36. MEMBERS ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2022/23

The Committee considered an early report on the Member's Allowance Scheme for 2022/23 and Officers sought understanding of any changes required to the current scheme, prior to approval by full Council. This was in accordance with Article 14.03 of the Council's Constitution.

The Committee noted that, before the Council could adopt a Members Allowances Scheme, it had a duty to consider the recommendations of an Independent Remuneration Panel in relation to the payment of Members Allowances. The most recent report had just been published on the 14th of January 2022. This was attached at Appendix 2. The Democratic Services Manager highlighted the key issues from the report which were:

- Continuing to recommend that the Basic Allowance is increased on an annual basis, in line with the local government officer pay increase.
- A further review of SRA's to be taken forward by the Independent Review Panel in 2022 to 2023, providing some potential recommendations for the 2023/24 municipal year.
- No changes to the SRA bandings published in the 2018 report.
- Acknowledgement of Councillors wider community leadership and partnership role.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The SRA bandings in the attached IRP report remained out of touch with local Council decision making on Member's Allowances and the SRA thresholds were too high. Committee Members felt that they were not realistic in expecting residents to accept these potentially high payments for local representations.
- The IRP report did not provide any evidence to support its claim that allowances should not be an incentive to carry out the Councillor role but also not be a disincentive.
- There was general agreement to the keeping the Basic Member Allowance index linked to rises to local government officer pay awards and it was suggested that the 1.75 increase being negotiated with local government officers could be applied and capped at this figure.
- There was discussion about the percentage rate connections between the SRA bandings and the Committee discussed the difficulties in having a set scheme as in Wales. The SRA's thresholds in Haringey were traditionally in the lower ranges of the proposed SRA bandings and noted that most Councils in London did not fully apply the SRA banding thresholds. This was a locally agreed issue with Councillors mindful of resident's expectations.

RESOLVED

To note the comments above and the report be considered at the 28th of February meeting following discussion with member colleagues.

37. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON ETHICAL STANDARDS.

The report highlighted recent developments in the ethical standards of elected members that might be of interest to members of the Standards Committee in its role of promoting and maintaining high standard of conduct. The report contained information on:

- Independent Investigator report considered by Southwark Council which found that Councillor had breached Code of Conduct by acting anonymously through Twitter. The Cabinet Member has since resigned but the report was helpful in understanding the situations where Councillors need to be aware if they are acting in them in their official and nonofficial capacity.
- Details of a case concerning a Councillor at Maldon District Council was included. The Councillor had breached a code of conduct and was found to be bullying colleagues and staff. When receiving the sanctions at a Council meeting, he had disrupted the meeting and Police were called.
- The Committee on Standards in Public Life published on 'Upholding Standards in Public Life', the final report and recommendations was included.

Comments and responses to Councillor questions were as follows:

- The information on ethical standards was reported on in the Local Government Lawyers bulletin.
- Considered whether the ban on a Councillor attending a meeting could be agreed as would mean disqualification of the Councillor.
- Regarding appointments to external private bodies and passing information after stopping being a Councillor, it was noted that any appointments to private bodies would need to be declared on the Councillor's Register of Interest. There was not much control in place once the Councillor was no longer in office. However, there could be legal proceedings taken forward for passing confidential information that would have been obtained when the individual was a Councillor.
- The Register of Interest form included a section for completing a note of gifts and hospitalities and Planning Members also needed to declare if they had been contacted for lobbying purposes.
- Regardless of the use social media, the key issue from the Southwark case was the Councillor deceitfully trying to influence decision making.
- Questioned whether the sanctions available to Councils when taking forward a breach of the Nolan principles were robust and strong enough to deter breaches.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

38. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED

To note the attached Committee Work programme.

39. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

40. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

28 February 2022.

41. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

To exclude the press and public as set 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.

42. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON - STANDARDS COMMITTEE FROM 30 JUNE 2022 - 29 JUNE 2023

As set out in the exempt minutes.

43. NEW ITEMS OF EXEMPT URGENT BUSINESS

None

CHAIR: Councillor Felicia Opoku

Signed by Chair

Date