

MINUTES OF MEETING Standards Committee HELD ON Monday, 28th February, 2022, 7.00 - 8.55 pm

PRESENT:

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

ALSO ATTENDING: Fiona Alderman, Stephen Lawrence – Orumwense, Ayshe Simsek

44. FILMING AT MEETINGS

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

45. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were later apologies for absence from Cllr Ogiehor.

46. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no new items of urgent business.

The Chair agreed to accept the following reports which were listed on the published agenda, as late business. These reports were late due to the need to update them following further key discussions and they also could not await the next meeting in June.

- Member's Allowance Scheme 2022/23
- LGA Code of Conduct.

47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

48. MINUTES

RESOLVED

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 25th of January 2022.

49. REGISTER OF INTERESTS - DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST IN LAND

This report responded to and took forward discussion from the previous Committee meetings on the declaration of home addresses on Members' Register of Interests forms.

It was noted that, since the previous discussion on this issue by the Committee, there had not been any new guidance from the government or LGA on withholding home addresses from their Register of Interests.

There had been more guidance issued for councillors on keeping safe but no changes to this requirement.

In response to questions

- Members still had an obligation to notify the Monitoring Officer of a change of address even if there had been previous agreement to not disclose the home address, due to this being a sensitive interest.
- Democratic Services would still need to keep a Register of Interest , for file purposes, and not for publication with a Member's address.
- Where the Monitoring Officer had agreed that a home address was treated as a sensitive interest, Members were still required at a meeting to disclose the fact that they had a disclosable interest in the matter concerned but details of that interest need not be disclosed.

RESOLVED

To note the report and for the Democratic Services Manager to provide an update to the Committee if there are any changes to legislation or guidance on this matter.

50. MEMBER'S ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2022/23

The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager introduced the report on the Member Allowance Scheme for 2022/23 and the Committee were asked to discuss and comment on any changes required to Appendix 1, Members Allowance Scheme 2022/23 as set out in paragraph 6.4 and 6.5.

The Committee considered the latest position on the local government officer pay increase of 1.75% which had not yet been agreed. The Committee felt that given the current economic climate together with steep increases in the cost of living being faced by residents, it was not felt appropriate to agree any increases to Member's Allowances. There was an annual opportunity to review the position on index linking the increase in the Basic Allowance to the local government officer pay increase in 2023.

RESOLVED

To recommend that the Members' Allowances Scheme, set out at Appendix A, be adopted by Full Council on 14 March 2022.

51. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA) MODEL COUNCILLOR CODE OF CONDUCT

The Committee were asked to discuss and comment on the LGA Model Code of Conduct and Guidance in Appendix 1 and 2 and consider comparison with the Council's Member Code of Conduct in Appendix 3.

The Committee were asked to note that there would be similar discussions with the Political Groups, Group Leaders, other Statutory Officers and the Independent Persons on the LGA Model Code attached

The Deputy Monitoring Officer continued to present information in the attached report.

In response to questions, the following was noted.

- The Deputy Monitoring officer offered to contact LGA to find out which Councils had not adopted the code and the reasons for this.
- The Council had already reduced the amount for declaring gifts and hospitality from £50 to £25.
- Noted that the guidance from the LGA provided useful examples which could be helpful for training sessions for new Members.
- The paragraphs highlighted in yellow were used for reading purposes.
- There was a query about the LGA code's direction on confidentiality and access to information and the exception that a councillor could disclose this information to a third party to obtain professional legal advice. It was clarified that queries raised about the confidential or exempt information should be put forward to the Monitoring Officer. The Deputy Monitoring Officer suggested that this direction may relate to a situation where the Member had a query about the obligation to not disclose and they may seek advice on the nature and extent of the obligation.
- The way the LGA deals with the classification of interests was different to the Council's Code of Conduct , which classifies interests as either personal, prejudicial and disclosable . The LGA code takes the issue of declaration of interests further and asks Members to fully consider the interest they have and even if it does not fit into the categories to declare this and consider if appropriate to participate in the meeting.
- Noted that the table on page 108 table contained an error in transposition.
- Comment was made about page 71 and the case examples provided concerning tweeting about another councillor's actions and how these had been found to be bringing the Council in disrepute. This was felt a harsh reprimand. The Deputy Monitoring officer added that councillors may take issue with the outcome arising from the particular case and this information was not included.

- The pathway forward for the report was to include comments from the Committee and be considered by political group leaders and political group members.
- Clarified that the new councillors in May 2022 would be adopting existing code of conduct.
- Agreed that key points from LGA Code are considered and compared to the Council Code of Conduct and also that the Committee and Members are kept abreast of any annual changes made by the LGA.
- The Deputy Monitoring Officer suggested developing a hybrid version of the Code of Conduct as there was some good elements from the LGA code that would be useful for the council to adopt.

RESOLVED

To note the report and receive an updated Code of Conduct following consultations with political groups.

52. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The LGA Code of conduct would likely come forward to a meeting of Standards Committee later in the year.

53. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no new items of urgent business.

54. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

30th of June 2022.

55. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

To exclude the press and public from the meeting as the remaining items 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.

56. NO. SC005/2021

Exempt information.

57. ANNUAL UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS

Deferred to the next meeting in June.

58. EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED

To approve the exempt minutes of the meeting held on the 25th of January 2022.

59. NEW ITEMS OF EXEMPT URGENT BUSINESS

None

CHAIR: Councillor Felicia Opoku

Signed by Chair

Date