

MINUTES OF THE MEETING Standards Committee HELD ON Tuesday, 4th February, 2025, 7pm – 7.45pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Erdal Dogan, Ibrahim Ali (Chair), Scott Emery and Reg Rice

**ALSO ATTENDING: Fiona Alderman, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance and
Ayshe Simsek Democratic Services Manager.**

21. FILMING AT MEETINGS

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

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Simmons – Safo and Cllr Barbara Blake.

Cllr Reg Rice substituted in accordance with CSO 53 to 56.

23. URGENT BUSINESS

There are no new items of business. Papers for items 8 were sent out late as officers were awaiting any publication of an updated Independent Remuneration Panel report. Item 9 was sent out late due to the need for consideration and comment by the Constitution Working Group. This item involved changes to the Constitution relating to list of documents for the Policy Framework and needed to be updated prior to the next meeting to allow the constitution to be as correct as possible.

The Chair accepted items 8 and 9 as late items.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25. MINUTES

RESOLVED

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 5 November 2024.

26. STANDARDS UPDATE

The Committee noted that the current government consultation on changes to the standards system, including reintroducing powers of suspension and widening circumstances in which members could be disqualified.

The Committee noted that the consultation was wide ranging and responded to a recent campaign that the standards regime was 'toothless'.

The report further included information on code of governance for statutory officers and a roundup of standards cases across the country to support the wider knowledge of the Committee.

The Chair invited comments from Members and the following was noted.

Whether legal aid may be accessible to Councillors who may be in the situation of challenging a potential disqualification or suspension and may not have the financial means to seek a defence. In response it was noted that there would likely need to be a need to consider the criminal burden of proof but the legal aid issue could be raised in the consultation response.

Noted that the Chair would send out a separate email to Councillors asking them to respond to the consultation.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

27. NO FURTHER ACTION CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS - MONITORING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT:

The Committee noted that the Protocol for Complaints Against Members required the Monitoring Officer to report annually to the Standards Committee on complaints dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and determined not to merit any further action. It was further noted that the Monitoring Officer must consult with the Independent Person before making her decision.

The Committee noted that in the period 1 May 2023 – 30 April 2024, the Monitoring Officer determined that 2 complaints of alleged breach of the code of conduct by councillors did not merit any further action. The rationale for the Monitoring Officer decisions were mostly that the conduct complained about did not demonstrate a breach of the code. The Independent Person was consulted in making these decisions and agreed with the Monitoring Officer's conclusion.

A table of the complaints was attached in the Exempt Report.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

28. MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME FOR 2025-2026

The Standards Committee were asked to comment on the Members Allowance scheme for the 2025/26 Municipal year and would be asked at their next meeting to recommend the final scheme for approval by full Council on the 24 of March 2025, in accordance with Article 14.03 of the Council's Constitution.

The Committee noted that before it can adopt a Members Allowances Scheme the Council has a duty to consider the recommendations of an Independent Remuneration Panel in relation to the payment of Members Allowances. As of the meeting, there had been no further update to the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel and the 2023 report continued to be appended for consideration.

There was discussion on continuing with the 2% increase to the basic allowance and the Committee noted that this would be a £13,338 additional budget cost. There was a need to consider the increases of the officer pay awards and note that the reasoning applied there could be applied to councillor basic pay. However, there was also comment made on the need to consider the financial situation of the Council. It was agreed that these issues were discussed further at respective political group meetings later in the month.

There was further consideration of the presentation of the Member Allowances SRA's at Appendix 1 Table A. It was noted that the Chair of General Purposes was also noted, within the table, to be Vice Chair of Appointments Panel and the Vice Chair of Disciplinary, Grievance and Dismissal Panel. There was comment made that this provided the impression that SRA's were applicable to Vice Chair roles and the Committee agreed that this be deleted from the table and added as a separate note in the scheme document.

The Chair of Standards also indicated considering a light touch consideration of the SRAs in 2025/2026, keeping within the allocated budget envelope and prior to the forthcoming local elections in 2026.

RESOLVED

To consider the current Member's Allowance Scheme and key findings of the remuneration of Councillors in London 2023 attached at Appendix 1 and note comments above and recommend changes for consideration at the 10th March meeting of Standards Committee.

29. REVISION OF THE LIST OF DOCUMENTS IN THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Committee noted that the Constitution set out the Council's governance arrangements and procedures. From time to time, changes were required to correct inaccuracies and reflect legislative changes.

The attached report set out proposed amendments to the Budget and Policy Framework which currently contained references to two obsolete plans along with an obsolete reference to the Cabinet Advisory Board.

The Constitution Working Group had considered the amendments and further proposed a change to the footnote as shown in Appendix 1 to show reasons why Annual Library Plan no longer referenced.

Although the 2000 Regulations still specify that the Council's Annual Library plan needs to be part of the Policy Framework, the Council is not currently required by statute to produce an Annual Library Plan under s1(2) of the Public Library and Museums Act 1964.

The Committee continued to agree the changes subject to the change being taken forward as listed above relating to the Library Plan.

RESOLVED

- a) To delete reference to the Annual Library Plan.
- b) To insert footnote as indicated above to show reasons why Annual Library Plan no longer referenced.
- c) To consider whether the prospective Library Strategy should be added to the Policy Framework.
- d) To delete reference to Best Value Performance Plan.
- e) To delete reference to Cabinet Advisory Board.
- f) To delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to prepare the dispensation for publication on the Council's website.

Reasons for decision

Due to changes in the law and statutory guidance, there is no longer a legal requirement for a Best Value Improvement Plan nor an Annual Library Plan. The Budget and Policy Framework therefore needs to be updated to reflect these changes. Article 14 of the Constitution requires the Monitoring Officer to review the operation of the Constitution to ensure the aims and principles of the Constitution are given full effect.

Alternative options considered

Not to update the policy framework. This option is not appropriate as it will not ensure that the Constitution is kept up to date and fit for purpose.

30. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

31. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

32. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Items 13-14 were subject to a motion to exclude the press and public from the meeting 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.

33. NO FURTHER ACTION CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS - MONITORING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT:

As set out in the exempt minutes.

34. NEW ITEMS OF EXEMPT URGENT BUSINESS

None

CHAIR: Councillor Ibrahim Ali

Signed by Chair

Date