

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at LH 0.06 - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 22 March 2018 from 10:00 – 11:05

Membership

Present

Councillor Jim Armstrong
Councillor Leslie Ayoola
Nigel Cullen
Councillor Neghat Khan
Councillor Ginny Klein
Councillor Wendy Smith
Councillor Chris Tansley (Chair)
Councillor Jane Urquhart (Vice Chair)

Absent

Councillor Andrew Rule,
Substituted by Councillor Jim
Armstrong

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Nancy Barnard - Governance Manager
Nigel Cullen - Independent Person for Standards
Sarah Molyneux - Head of Legal and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer

11 CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Committee noted the appointment of Cllr Andrew Rule to the Committee and the resignation of Cllr Jon Collins from the Committee.

12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Andrew Rule – work commitments.
Councillor Ginny Klein – apologies for lateness due to transport problems.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

14 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

15 SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

Sarah Molyneux, Head of Legal and Governance and Nancy Barnard, Governance Manager introduced the report which had been requested by Councillors at a previous meeting. The following points were highlighted during the discussion:

- a) The draft guidance is written in order to advise Councillors on avoiding difficult situations in their use of social media.
- b) Training is to be arranged for Councillors to cover both the safe management of social media activity and how to effectively use social media as a councillor. It will be delivered in house.

RESOLVED to

- (1) Approve the draft guidance for circulation to all councillors, and**
- (2) Arrange training for Councillors on the use of social media as soon as possible.**

16 COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE - CONSULTATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS

Councillor Ginny Klein joined the meeting at this point.

Sarah Molyneux, Head of Legal and Governance and Nancy Barnard, Governance Manager introduced the report which invited the Committee to consider a draft response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's consultation on Ethical Standards in Local Government. During the discussion the following points were raised:

- a) The sanctions available to Councils to address breaches of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members are too limited to deal with the most serious cases. Not having sufficient sanctions could lead to cases stagnating as little action can be taken and may lead to dissatisfaction with the process from citizens and others involved in the case.
- a) The Council has effective, legally compliant arrangements in place for dealing with alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. These involve the political Groups, the Monitoring Officer, the Independent Person and, ultimately, this Committee but these are limited by national restrictions on action that can be taken. To ensure consistency, should new sanctions be brought in to address serious breaches, these should be accompanied by national guidance on the circumstances in which sanctions should be applied.
- b) Councillors are required to attend training on the Code of Conduct and on Safeguarding when they take up office. Training is also being arranged on the safe proper use of social media and there is a comprehensive induction programme for new councillors.

- c) The role of the Independent Person is valuable but in the more serious cases the involvement of an independent body separate from the authority of which the councillor or co-optee is a member would be appropriate. Options that could be explored could include reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities or panels made up of a number of Independent Persons appointed by local authorities in the area.
- d) The Committee acknowledged the challenges of requiring co-opted members to register and publish interests in the same way as councillors suggesting it might be appropriate for co-optees to register interests relevant to the role they have been appointed to and for those registered interests to be held by the Monitoring Officer and not published. Co-opted members would continue to be responsible for declaring their interests at meetings and not participating in any matter in which they have an interest. This is explained to co-opted members during their induction.
- e) The Committee was not aware of any serious intimidation of councillors having occurred locally but did raise concern about how to deal with difficult individuals such as vexatious complainants.

RESOLVED to

- (1) Approve the draft response to the consultation subject to amendments based on the comments outlined above,**
- (2) Delegate authority to the Chair of the Committee to approve the final draft for submission to the Committee on Standards in Public Life,**
- (3) Share the response with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Standards prior to submission,**
- (4) Request that the Governance Manager raise the issue of arranging training for Councillors on dealing with difficult individuals.**

17 COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS – 6 MONTH REVIEW

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.