

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 June 2022

PRESENT – Councillors, P Akhtar (Chair), L Salton (Vice Chair) S Ali, J Casey, K Connor, S Desai, and N Slater.

Independent – Paul Fletcher

OFFICERS – Asad Laher, Shannon Gardiner and Jill Readfern

RESOLUTIONS

1 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Elaine Whittingham, Miranda Carruthers-Watt and Alan Eastwood.

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 30th March 2022 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

3 **Declaration of Interest**

RESOLVED – There were no Declarations of Interest received.

4 **Membership for Standards Committee**

The Committee discussed the membership of the Standards Committee and that it was made up of 9 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Councillors, 2 Independent Members, 2 independent Persons and 2 Parish Councillors.

The Deputy Director of Legal and Governance, Asad Laher, informed the Committee that 1 Independent Member and Parish Councillor had been absent from the Standards Committee for a number of meetings and asked if they should recruit new members. The Committee agreed that the absent members would be contacted a final time to ask if they wish to stay on the Standards Committee.

The Committee also needed a second Parish Councillor Representative to join the committee. It was noted that the Members would ask their Parish Councils for volunteers alongside Officers writing out to all Parish's regarding the position.

RESOLVED –

- That the Officers would write to the absent members regarding their membership on the Standards Committee
- That all Parish Councils would be informed of the vacancy and be invited to apply

5 Standards Arrangements

The Committee received a presentation from Asad Laher on the Standards Arrangements.

The presentation covered what the Standards Committee was, the importance of the Committee and what it stood for. It was presented that the role of the Standards Committee was to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, to review the Code, Member development, dispensations and to appoint Hearing Panels.

The Committee was established in 2012 and had a membership of 9 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Members, 2 Parish/Town Council, 2 Independent Members and Independent Persons. Only the Blackburn with Darwen Members have the right to vote.

The presentation also covered other areas of the Standards Committee such as;

- Predetermination
- The Localism Act 2011
- Code of conduct
- Register of Interests
- Registration
- Disclosure of Interests including Sensitive Interests
- Dispensations
- Sanctions
- Investigating and determining complaints

RESOLVED –

- That the presentation be noted

6 Member Training 2022/2023

The Committee reviewed the Member Training 2021/22 and considered the training programme for 2022/23.

The Council offered online MeLearning E-learning facility as part of a blended approach to learning, which the Committee had previously endorsed. The MeLearning portal had a selection of courses available to all Members. On-line training (via MeLearning and MS Team presentations) provided a vital training method during the pandemic for ensuring members kept up to date with key areas of their role.

In addition to the constitutional requirement for elected members sitting on Planning & Highways and Licensing Committees, three other essential training courses were made available online specifically for councillors:

- Civil Contingencies for Elected Members
- DOJO Cyber Security Awareness
- Information Governance for Elected Members

All elected members were expected to undertake and refresh their training in the above three areas. The Committee was requested to consider the continuation of the essential courses relating to Information Governance and

DOJO Cyber Security Awareness, and method of learning that best delivers the outcomes. The Committee were aware of the importance of these courses for both officer and councillors who use the Council's IT systems to undertake their roles.

The Committee also recommended previously that all elected members should undertake the equality and diversity training & workshop, which would be an externally arranged in-person event. This had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions but can now continue at a future date in 2022/23.

The MeLearning portal offered a number of generic e-courses available to elected members and staff, produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) specifically targeted at Councillors. These relevant courses can be accessed by Members at any time and at their convenience.

The committee discussed the mandatory training courses and raised that if a Member did not undertake the training that were no sanctions or consequences enforced.

The Chair of the committee stressed the importance of these training courses and encouraged Members to undertake the training by the end of August. The training courses were provided to benefit Members and to also protect them. The Members agreed that hybrid training was the best approach as it reduced travel and Members could undertake training from the comfort of their own homes.

RESOLVED –

- That the Equality and Diversity training would be delivered in person be noted
- That the training programme delivered in 2021/22 was reviewed and the training programme for 2022/23 was considered
- That the Members of the committee should complete the following training modules by the next meeting on 28th September 2022;
 - Civil Contingencies for Elected Members
 - DOJO Cyber Security Awareness
 - Information Governance for Elected Members

7 Standards Committee Work Programme

The Committee discussed its work programme for 2022/23. The Standard's Committee's role and function included monitoring the operation of the Council's standards arrangements and to make such recommendations to the Council as the Committee considers appropriate with respect to:

- The promotion and maintenance of high standards in the conduct of council and Parish/Town Councils business, and in the conduct of Members;
- The maintenance and review of a Code of Conduct for Members of the Council, together with such other code, procedure, protocol or guidance as the Committee considers to be appropriate and to make recommendations to the Council on such codes and regulations;

- The provision of training, guidance and assistance for Members in relation to the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and any other such code, procedure or protocol.

Although there has been some disruption in the schedule of meetings due to the Covid restrictions, the Standards Committee had considered personal safety for members, which remained a continuing concern with the number of incidents of abuse via social media or direct physical confrontations being noted nationally as on the increase.

During 2022/23, the Committee also considered the virtual meetings Member Protocol, petitions advice for councillors and a review of the arrangements for the registration of member interests.

The Monitoring Officer had received a number of complaints against members during 2021/22 many of which related to the use of social media. The Committee considered the issues around social media and how further training and guidance would be beneficial for Members and agreed to include social media in the work programme 2022/23.

The Chair of the committee also suggested a further review of the code of conduct which was subsequently approved by Full Council to continue with local updated code of conduct in March 2021.

RESOLVED –

- That training and guidance for Members on social media be included in the 2022/23 work programme
- That a review of the code of conduct be included in the 2022/23 work programme

8 DBS Checks for Councillors

A report was submitted to the committee to advise Members in relation to the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check for councillors.

In July 2019 it was agreed that that all Councillors would be required to undertake a DBS check appropriate to their role, either standard or enhanced. The Governance team have assisted Members with the application process however it remains the individual Members responsibility to ensure that they had the necessary current DBS certificate. Although there was no specific legal requirement to undertake DBS checks on elected members, the council can lawfully decide to introduce it.

The DBS certificate is valid for four years and the majority of Councillors have a valid DBS certificate. Checks are required for newly elected Councillors and the Governance team will check that all other Members have current certificates. The Standards Committee will receive regular updates on DBS checks.

All DBS checks by the Council need to be in accordance with The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. The DBS policy has been developed to ensure

lawfulness and transparency in the Council's procedures when undertaking DBS checks for elected Members and it also promotes greater public confidence in the role of councillors.

RESOLVED –

- That the Committee noted the Governance Team will check all Members have a current DBS certificate and assist any newly elected Councillors in from May 2022 with the application process

9 Complaints Update

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on complaints received regarding Members conduct under the Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members since March 2022.

The Monitoring Officer had received one complaint from a member of staff regarding a councillor. The councillor had undertaken some maintenance work within the Borough. The complaint was coming to a conclusion and should be resolved in the next couple of weeks.

RESOLVED – That the update report be noted.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed