

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 26 June 2024

PRESENT – Councillors, Ehsan Raja (Chair), Khan, Casey, Connor, Masters, Slater and Whittingham.

ALSO PRESENT – Les Cade and Daniel Wilde

OFFICERS – Asad Laher and Nafisha Master

RESOLUTIONS

6 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Stephanie Brookfield, Miranda Carruthers-Watt, Alan Eastwood and Paul Fletcher.

7 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20th December 2023 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

8 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

9 **Member Training - 2024/25**

The Member Training 2023/2024 was submitted to the Members of the Committee to review and to consider the training programme for 2024/25.

The Standards Committee plays a key role in directing the provision of member development in order to ensure that elected members receive training, which meets their needs as decision makers and ward councillors. The Committee therefore reviews and updates the training and development needs each year and considers the training programme. The programme includes items that the Committee consider mandatory and areas that it also feels necessary for members to be aware of in carrying out their duties generally as a Councillor and in their specific roles.

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

The following training courses are mandatory for Elected Members:

- Member Induction
- Effective Overview & Scrutiny for Chairs and Vice-Chairs
- Information Governance DOJO Cyber Security

- Adult's Safeguarding
- Children's Safeguarding
- Corporate Parenting

In addition to the existing mandatory member training courses for Elected Members, the Committee is requested to note the inclusion of the Corporate Parenting course as a mandatory course.

By way of background, when a child comes into care, the Council becomes the Corporate Parent for that child. Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the Council (comprising all Elected Members) and its employees for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for looked after children. By dint of their election to Council, all Councillors are Corporate Parents. To ensure the Councillors can discharge their responsibilities in this respect, it is proposed to make training on Corporate Parenting a mandatory requirement. Doing so will help embed the culture to do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the Council is the 'best parent' it can be to the child or young person.

RESOLVED –

- That the committee noted the inclusion of the Corporate Parenting Training as a mandatory requirement
- The committee reviewed the local training programme delivered for 2023/24
- That the Elected Members Development Programme 2024/25 be noted

10 Standards Arrangements

The Committee received a presentation from Asad Laher, Deputy Director – Legal and Governance, 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;

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

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

11 Planning Protocol for Members and Officers

A report was submitted to Committee to provide the Members with the draft Planning Protocol for them to consider and review.

Planning protocols were essential frameworks that guide the systematic approach to planning activities within the Council. These protocols ensure that all necessary steps are taken, risks are managed, and resources are allocated efficiently.

One of the key purposes of the planning system was to manage development in the public interest. In performing this role, planning necessarily affects land and property interests, particularly the financial value of landholdings and the quality of their settings. It is important, therefore, that the Council should make planning decisions affecting these interests openly, impartially, with sound judgement and for justifiable reasons. The process should leave no grounds for suggesting that a decision had been partial, biased or not well founded in any way.

Members role in the Planning process was to make decisions openly, impartially, with sound judgement and for justifiable planning reasons. When planning applications are reported to the Planning and Highways Committee, the report will contain an Officer recommendation as to whether planning permission should be granted or refused. Members are entitled to bring their own judgment to bear on planning applications and to make a decision contrary to Officer recommendation, but it is important that such decisions are taken on sound planning grounds which will withstand scrutiny.

The Standard's Committee's role and function as delegated by the Council includes assisting Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Code of Conduct. The Committee also has a function to monitor the operation of the Council's standards arrangements and make appropriate recommendations to the Council as it considers appropriate with respect to the maintenance and review of the Code, together with such other codes, procedure, protocol, or guidance as the committee considers appropriate.

RESOLVED –

- The Committee review the Planning Protocol
- To recommend to Full Council to adopt the Planning Protocol for Members and Officers and for inclusion in the Council's Constitution

12 Complaints Update

Asad Laher, Monitoring Officer, updated the committee on complaints received under the adopted Arrangements for dealing with Member complaints for alleged breach of the Member's Code of Conduct.

It was noted that complaints were received during the PCC & Local Elections and the General Election. The complaints were around the campaign period

and involved campaigners and local councillors. It was dealt with as a Police matter due to the nature of the incident.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed