

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
16th July 2018

PRESENT – Councillor Saima Afzal (Chair)
Councillor Neil Slater (Vice Chair)
Councillor Vicky McGurk
Councillor Talseem Fazal
Councillor Julie Gunn
Councillor Naushad Surve
Councillor Sylvia Liddle
Councillor Jamie Groves

Independent Member - Tassadaq Hussain

Also Present – David Fairclough, Monitoring Officer
Stuart Wright, Independent Person

RESOLUTIONS

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from, Paul Fletcher, Independent Member, Daniel Wilde, Parish Councillor.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on the 4th January 2018

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 4th January 2018 be agreed as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest in items on this Agenda

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

4. Update on receipt of Register of Interest Forms

David Fairclough reported to the Committee that currently there were 3 forms outstanding. It was resolved that David as Monitoring Officer remind Members of their obligations and also identify for group leaders those members who had not yet completed their forms. David was asked to ensure Members were advised to submit their forms by the end of the week and update the Committee at its next meeting.

5. **Member Induction and Training Programme 2018/19**

The Committee noted that following the election on 3rd May 2018 in accordance with good practice an induction process was put in place to assist members in their role as Councillors.

It was also noted that Members training and development was now under the remit of the Standards Committee and a draft programme was presented for consideration by the Committee.

The programme included items that this Committee had previously considered as mandatory and areas that the committee had felt previously necessary for members to be aware of in carrying out their duties as a Councillor.

It was noted this training offer is now supplemented by Councillors having access to the 'MeLearning' platform which provides a range of 'online' training courses.

The Standards Committee had previously also agreed that a number of topics should be Mandatory for all members of the Council these topics included Child Sexual Exploitation, Data Protection and The Code of Conduct. Training for Members who wish to sit or substitute on the Planning and Highways and Licensing Committees also was mandatory as was Corporate Parenting training.

The Committee noted it has previously looked at a number of issues that members have felt should be offered as general training for all Council Members to ensure that they are aware of in their role as elected member. This had resulted in a broad programme of 'bitesize' training events delivered by officers throughout the municipal year.

At the meeting of the Policy and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5th March 2018 the Committee looked at two issues that members have asked this committee to consider for inclusion in the Members Induction Training Programme. These issues being; Data Protection/ Handling Information and Health and Safety. The Committee asked the Standards Committee to consider making Data Protection/Handling information mandatory for members and that Health and Safety for Councillors be included in the wider Induction Programme.

A request had also been put forward by the International Women Week Organising Committee that the equality agenda be addressed for members through training. This would involve making Members of the Council aware of the issues affecting all sections of the community and how the Council's policies can have implications for these different sections.

From all this a draft list of items to be included in the induction process for new Members had been drawn up and was presented in the report to this meeting for Member's consideration alongside some early suggestions for the 'Bitesize'

training programme for 2018/19. A copy of the 'Bitesize' programme from 2017/18 was attached also for information.

It had also been suggested that regularly throughout the year there should be the consideration of some general strategic briefings for all members covering key elements of their roles and responsibilities. The programme it was suggested could include:

Session 1

Induction (including Code of Conduct)

Session 2

Familiarisation -The Borough, facts & figures (including population, wards, boundaries) & understanding the Council – its role function, duties & responsibilities, departmental contacts and functions

Session 3

Being a Councillor – Health & Safety, Information Management, Handling Conflict, dealing with difficult situations, Advocating effectively, Chairing meetings etc.

Session 4

Understanding Local Government Finance

Members of the Committee considered the background to all the training undertaken in recent years and considered the positive and less positive aspects of the approach and the training itself.

Focussing initially on the 'bitesize' training Members of the Committee expressed views about the varying quality of the presentations and felt that, if they were to continue they should be more concise, focus on simple messages and perhaps be combined so that two topics could be covered in the hour slot. During the course of the discussion the Committee also concluded that these courses did lend themselves more to their replacement over time with 'e-learning' solutions. The numbers of courses was also discussed and although the Committee considered and understood that they were designed to be optional course to attend, their number and frequency presented potential pressures and feelings of obligation for councillors to try and attend.

In this context, the committee reviewed the increasing time pressures placed on councillors currently and therefore in considering the future programme of training, the combining of as many 'face to face' training events into fewer actual evening commitments would be an advantage.

It was also in this context, that given the amount of information councillors were required to have a general understanding of, that the 'bitesize' programme could not end completely but the committee considered it should be phased out over time with more use made of digital solutions.

The Committee noted that the e-learning platform was currently available for access by all members and that training courses were being added all the time and all 51 councillors would be invited shortly (as in previous years) to sign up. With more members signing up, the design and delivery of focussed 'on line' training events would progress.

It was acknowledged that there would remain the need for some Mandatory training events and that these would/should be a combination of 'face to face' and e-learning over time, with also the option of video presentations for review by members.

The Committee also concluded after much discussion that where a councillor had attended a mandatory course the previous year they need not be required to attend the following year (as a re-fresh).

It was also recommended that the Mandatory training events be scheduled in the year planner approved at Annual Council each year, with training programmes based as now on municipal years.

Given the fact that incidents could occur during the year that require councillors to receive additional training, for example in 2017 a mandatory 'civil contingencies' session was held. The Committee noted that there would be occasions when new courses would need to be added in year. Where possible this would follow a discussion with the Committee. It was noted however that the number of Mandatory Courses would be kept to a minimum and, it was agreed for 2018/19, that the course introduced for 'civil contingencies' be removed from the list and added to the 'bitesize' programme.

Discussion also took place as regards the member's strategic development sessions which commenced this year with a full induction programme (given the election of 51 councillors to the 'new' council post boundary review).

With the previous discussions confirming the phasing out over time of the 'bitesize' training and emphasis on digital solutions, the determination of some sessions with combined agenda's covering a range of issues in one night, 4 times a year was considered to be a potential solution to the issues of pressures on members time.

It was also concluded that in the event of a training issue being identified late in the year, that needed to be presented to all members, Officers could be invited to Group meetings to undertake short training briefings.

The Standards Committee also considered the invitation of, Independent Members of Committee, Co-opted members, independent persons and Members of Parish Councils to some elements of the programme. The Committee concluded that some of the revised programme could be made available and asked for the Monitoring Officer to open relevant courses for attendance including the e-learning solution where practicable.

RESOLVED –

1. To phase out the `bitesize` training programme during 2018/19, replacing with e-learning programmes, group briefings or video presentations going forward into the programme to be designed for 19/20.
2. To move `civil contingencies update training` to a `bitesize` event for 2018/19.
3. To advise the Monitoring Officer when promoting the 2018/19 `bitesize` events to ensure the notifications of the training are clear these events are optional for members to attend.
4. To confirm that the following Courses will be Mandatory for 2018/19:
 - Child Sexual Exploitation
 - Corporate parenting
 - Information Governance & Cybersecurity
 - Equality Training
5. To agree that attendance at the Mandatory Training is a requirement for all Councillors, except where a Councillor has attended the same course in the previous municipal year.
6. To note that additional Mandatory Courses can be added to the programme during the year where circumstances require.
7. To note that the specific Mandatory Training for Members sitting on the Council's Planning & Highways and Licensing Committees would continue as required in the Council's Constitution.
8. To agree there would be four Strategic Member Development Sessions per annum and for this year, they would cover the issues as presented in the report to this meeting.
9. To agree that all mandatory Training and the four Strategic Member Development Sessions be included in the year planner approved by the Council at Annual Council each year.
10. To agree that Independent Members of Committees, Co-opted members, independent persons and Members of Parish Councils be invited by the Monitoring Officer to appropriate training events as per the revised programme now agreed.

6. Complaints Update to the Standards Committee

Members received an update on complaints received regarding Members conduct under the Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members. At the meeting in January 2018 (the March meeting was cancelled) the Monitoring Officer reported on cases up to 15th December 2018. An update was presented on a case reported after the January meeting. The Committee would be updated at its next meeting of any complaints received and registered after January 2018.

RESOLVED – That the update report be noted.

7. Local Government ethical Standards Consultation

The Committee noted that the Committee on Standards in Public Life is undertaking a review of local government ethical standards.

As part of this review they conducted consultation between 29th January 2018 and 18th May 2018

The terms of reference for the review were:

1. *Examine the structures, processes and practices in local government in England for:*
 - a. *Maintaining codes of conduct for local councillors;*
 - b. *Investigating alleged breaches fairly and with due process;*
 - c. *Enforcing codes and imposing sanctions for misconduct;*
 - d. *Declaring interests and managing conflicts of interest; and*
 - e. *Whistleblowing.*
2. *Assess whether the existing structures, processes and practices are conducive to high standards of conduct in local government;*
3. *Make any recommendations for how they can be improved; and*
4. *Note any evidence of intimidation of councillors, and make recommendations for any measures that could be put in place to prevent and address such intimidation.*

The review is to consider all levels of local government in England, including town and parish councils, principal authorities, combined authorities (including Metro Mayors) and the Greater London Authority (including the Mayor of London).

The Standards Committee received a report which set out responses to the consultation questions. The response was sent on behalf of the Chair and Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted

8. Work Programme 2018/19

The Committee considered its priorities for a work programme for meetings in 2018/19. The committee identified that it would wish to review the protocols in the Constitution under Part 5, Section 3 over the next two meetings. In so doing the committee was keen to consider the drafting of a Member/Member protocol to compliment the Member/Officer protocol in the constitution.

Members of the Committee also discussed the `vexatious' complainant references in the members Complaints process and indicated that they would wish to review this as part of this years work programme.

It was also proposed by the Chair that the date of the January meeting be moved and this was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED –

1. To agree the change of date for the January meeting from 9th January 2019 to 14th January 2019.
2. To agree that at the October 2018 meeting the Committee consider the drafting of a – Member/Member Protocol to compliment the Members Code of Conduct
3. To agree that at the January 2019 meeting the Committee review the Member/Officer Protocol (carried forward from January 2018)
4. To agree that at the March 2019 meeting the Committee review the Arrangements for dealing with Complaints in respect of Members Code of Conduct – in particular the handling vexatious complainants

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....