

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 15 January 2020

PRESENT – Councillors; Afzal (Chair) Casey, Gunn, McGurk, Pearson, Slater and Whittle.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Tassadaq Hussain, Paul Fletcher and Stewart Wright (Independent Members)

OFFICERS – David Fairclough, Asad Laher, Graham Fawcett, Fiona Eastwood, Rachel Hutchinson and Shannon Gardiner.

RESOLUTIONS

23 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting. Apologies were received from Alan Eastwood (Independent Person).

24 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd October 2019, be agreed as a correct record.

25 **Declaration of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

26 **Personal Safety for Elected Members**

Members of the Committee were asked to approve a local Personal Safety Guide for Councillors incorporating a local Guide to handling intimidation to supplement the LGA (Local Government Association) Guide published on 4th July 2019.

The LGA Guide covered topics such as how to handle abuse, both face-to-face, letters or online, and the legal and practical remedies, including the nature of the criminal offences involved and the LGA confirmed this would be continuously updated with the latest advice and information available.

The Monitoring Officer circulated a link to the Guide to all Councillors in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council on the date of publication and advised that the Standards Committee would consider a review of the Guide alongside our current local general advice to members.

At the Standards Committee meeting in October 2019, Members discussed the Guide and suggested that a shortened local Guide be produced to supplement the national guide. This had been drafted by officers and due to the General Election was circulated in draft form to all Elected Members to assist them in the event of any issues arising during the campaigning. It was now proposed that the Standards Committee consider recommending to the Full Council the formal adoption of the local Guide re-titled to Personal Safety Guide for Councillors to supplement that produced by the LGA

Discussions took place regarding the Personal Safety Guide and how accessible it would be for Members. It was noted that both Guides were to be available on the Council's website and for Members to save any affiliated links to their desktops for easy access.

Within the Personal Safety Guide was a link to the Caution list and it was advised to always check the list proper to any visit or meeting with someone not known to the Members. It was noted that the Caution list was monitored and recorded how many times the list was visited so that it was not being mistreated.

RESOLVED –

- That the local short Personal Safety Guide for Members be approved
- That the Personal Safety Guide be recommended to the Full Council for formal adoption

27 Member Training 2019/2020 Update

A report was brought to Committee which reviewed the Member training programme 2019/20.

At a previous Committee meeting the Members discussed the identification of additional areas and courses that they would like to see covered/developed for the programme. This was in response to a number of issues that Members had with regular `face to face` training events which was not always accessible due to work/personal commitments or political surgeries.

As part of the Digital Strategy, many courses for staff (and partners) in the Council were now managed through `e-learning` which addressed many of the concerns raised by Members who had traditionally only accessed `face to face` training events. It was noted that over 46,000 courses had been completed and over 50,000 people had been enrolled.

It is also recognised that people learnt in different ways and at varying speeds depending on the nature of the learning taking place. E-learning offered a solution which meant that people could learn at their own pace, privately and without peer or other pressures.

E-learning was available 24 hours a day which was often considered a valuable option for people with very busy lives and was easily accessible for Members as the application for E-learning had been placed on each Members desktop.

To date the experience of Councillors had been mixed. and the Committee would be provided with an up to date position at the meeting. It had previously been agreed 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.

Rachel Hutchinson, Resilience and Emergency Planning Manager delivered a presentation to the Committee that advised Members of MeLearning training

around Resilience and Emergency. The MeLearning system had a basic level of information which was essential for all Elected Member to be aware of. The training would assist Members in an emergency and how to share information to their constituents.

The Resilience and Emergency Planning training would be held annually, at any time of the year, and would be refreshed every other year or as necessary by Resilience and Emergency Planning team. The annual training would provide specific awareness of range of additional scenarios, relevant information and the opportunity to ask detailed questions.

RESOLVED –

- That the continued digitisation of training interventions for Elected Members be endorsed and that the report be noted.
- That the Members be enrolled onto the Resilience and Emergency Training as a priority
- That the Members were made aware of the MeLearning icon located on their Council tablet/computer

28 Guidance for Councillors on Personal References

Members were requested to consider the proposed revised guidance to Councillors in responding to requests for personal references.

The Standards Committee on 23rd October 2019 considered the report on advice for Councillors handling reference requests and referred to the advice issued in December 2016. The discussion referred to recent issues experienced by some Councillors when requested for personal references by their constituents.

Advice from the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer could be sought by Councillors as and when needed. However, the Committee suggested that an updated Guidance on personal references would be helpful covering references for passport applications, criminal matters in court and employment related matters. Advice was last issued in December 2016 and requests had been made for this advice to be reviewed and if appropriate, updated and re-issued.

Discussion took place regarding personal experiences when being approached for a personal references and passport applications. Members were informed that there was no legal obligation to provide a reference or testimonials, nor were there any legal restrictions. It was noted that Councillors should not provide personal references on any matters where the Council was involved anyway; otherwise there could be a potential breach of the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED -

- That the revised guidance for Councillors on Handling Reference Requests be approved
- That the Council be recommended to adopt the guidance and thereafter request that all Councillors comply with the guidance issued.

29 Complaints Update

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on complaints received regarding Members under the Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members up to 30th November 2019.

It was noted that during October 2019 a complaint was received regarding an Elected Members alleged conduct towards an officer. Following a meeting with the complainant, supported by a Deputy Monitoring Officer, the Elected Member offered an apology which was accepted by the officer concerned and therefore no further action was required under the pressure.

Up to 30th November 2019 there was no further complaints received under the Members Complaints Procedures.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed