

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE
Thursday 9 November 2023

Present:- Councillor Griffin (in the Chair); Councillors Bacon, Z. Collingham, Keenan, Wilson, Buckley, Carroll and Mr. R. Swann.

Also in attendance Mr. P. Beavers, Independent Person, along with Mr. S. Fletcher, Mr. P. Horsfield and Mrs. B. Nahal.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors McNeely, Hughes and Yasseen and Mrs. A. Bingham, Mr. P. Edler and Mrs. K. Penney and Mr. D. Roper-Newman.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Griffin declared a personal interest in Minute No. 18 (Complaints) on the basis that he was a party involved in a complaint.

Councillor Keenan declared a personal interest in Minute No. 18 (Complaints) on the basis that she was a party involved in a complaint.

12. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for Agenda Items 8 and 9 (Considering of Whistleblowing Policy and Complaints) on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

13. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15TH JUNE, 2023

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th June, 2023 were approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

14. CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE - UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 23 of the meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee held on 19th January, 2023, consideration was given to the report presented by the Service Manager which provided an update on the adoption of the Civility and Respect Pledge by the Borough's Parish and Town Councils.

One of the recommendations from that meeting was for the Chair of the Committee to write to all Parish and Town Councils in the Borough setting out the benefits of the Civility in Respect Pledge and encouraging them to sign up.

Details about the Pledge had also been discussed at the Parish Liaison

Group and the Parish Liaison Officer had provided support to Parish Councils accordingly.

It was also suggested at that meeting the Committee receive an update in due course as to how many Parish and Town Councils had signed up to the Pledge and their experience of the same.

The Committee were advised that twelve responses had been received. From those twelve responses, seven confirmed they had signed up and adopted the Pledge and five confirmed they had decided not to do so.

The reasons for signing and the reasons for not signing were set out in detail as part of the report, but those Parishes deciding not to sign up did not feel there was a need and those that had signed up had not really seen any discernible difference.

The Committee were advised the adoption of the Pledge was a matter for Parish and Town Councils, but they would continue to be encouraged to do so and the benefits widely available to them emphasised.

The Committee were disappointed in the number of responses received to date given the number of Parish and Town Councils in the Borough. On this basis it was suggested that further correspondence be issued to Parish Clerks setting out the full details of the Pledge and links to the various websites and documents that described and demonstrated how Parish and Town Councils would benefit from the Civility and Respect Pledge adoption.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That further correspondence be issued to Parish Clerks providing full details of how Parish and Town Councils would benefit from the Civility and Respect Pledge adoption.

15. **STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE - HEARINGS PANEL - ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS**

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the periodic review of the Standards and Ethics Committee Sub-Committee Hearing Procedure which was in place in accordance with the Local Government Association Guidance on Complaint Handling, published in July, 2021.

The Monitoring Officer having considered the Hearing Procedure was of the opinion that no changes were required.

The Committee were asked if they had any views as to the operation of the procedure and whether any improvements were considered necessary.

The Committee and one of the Independent Person at the meeting were in full agreement that the procedure currently in place was robust and appropriate. No changes were recommended.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the Sub-Committee Hearing Procedure as presented be approved as fit for purpose in its current format.

16. TRAINING UPDATE

Consideration was given to a verbal update of the training that had been arranged recently on 6th September, 2023 relating to the Code of Conduct.

The training arranged was well attended with invitations having been issued to all Parish and Town Councils and the training presentation and associated documents were circulated to all Clerks for the content to be shared and digested.

Resolved:- That the update be received and the contents noted.

17. A REVIEW OF CONCERNS RAISED PURSUANT TO THE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer which provided an overview of the Whistleblowing cases which have been received over the past year and to examine if there were any particular trends emerging.

Particular reference was made to the appendix to the report which set out clearly the description of the concerns received and action taken. It was apparent from the documentation that there were no consistent themes in the nature of the cases, which would require further action, over and above that taken in respect of each matter raised.

Resolved:- That the Whistleblowing concerns raised over the previous year and the actions taken to address these matters be noted.

18. CONSIDERATION OF COMPLAINTS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Service Manager detailing the progress with the handling of complaints relating to breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and Town and Parish Councillors. The report listed the current cases of complaint and the action being taken in respect of each one.

Details were provided on each related case, without providing personal information, and recommended outcomes/actions identified were highlighted.

Two cases recommended that Sub-Committee hearings be convened and arrangements would be put in place for these to be heard as soon as practically possible.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That arrangements be made for two Sub-Committee hearings to be convened.

19. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Committee's consideration.

20. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee be held on Thursday, 18th January, 2024, commencing at 2.00 p.m. at the Town Hall.