

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

19th January, 2023

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Bacon, Z. Collingham, Griffin, Hughes, Wilson, Parish Councillors Buckley and Swann and also Mr. P. Edler (Independent Member).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tarmey, Yasseen and Mrs. M. Carroll and Mrs. A. Bingham, Mrs. M. Evers and Mrs. K. Penney (Independent Members).

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Parish Councillor Buckley declared a personal interest in Minute No. 25 (Review of Complaints) on the basis that he had some knowledge of one of the complaints.

21. 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 Minute Nos. 25 (Review of Complaints) and 26 (Review of Concerns raised pursuant to the Whistleblowing Policy) on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

22. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15TH SEPTEMBER, 2022

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th September, 2022 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

23. PLEDGE OF CIVILITY AND RESPECT - PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Service Manager regarding the Civility and Respect Pledge, its aims and objectives and the requirements for a Local Council to sign up the Pledge.

The Civility and Respect Pledge was the response by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to the growing concerns about the impact bullying, harassment, and intimidation were having on Parish and Town Councils, Councillors, Clerks and Council staff and the resulting effectiveness of local councils. As such NALC were recommending it was the time to put civility and respect at the top of the agenda and start a culture change for the local council sector.

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The Civility and Respect Pledge was easy for Parish and Town Councils to sign up to and would enable Parish and Town Councils to demonstrate that they were committed to standing up to poor behaviour across the sector and to drive through positive changes which supported civil and respectful conduct.

NALC were inviting all Parish and Town Councils to take the Civility and Respect Pledge.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer and Service Manager had attended a recent webinar about the Civility and Respect Pledge and the presentation delivered was shared with the Committee. The presentation covered:-

- The Project Group.
- Mission and Objectives.
- Civility Consortium Model.
- The Civility Pledge – Branding.
- Bespoke Training.
- E-Learning Modules.
- On Demand HR Podcast.
- Recruitment Guide.
- Governance Support.
- Step By Step Guide including Communication.
- Legal Framework.
- Second Early Day Motion.
- Members of Parliament Drop In Sessions.
- Levelling Up Briefing.
- Collaboration Workstream.

Discussion ensued about the commitment of Town and Parish Councils to signing up to the Pledge to forge through a change in culture and behaviour and the ability of the Committee to monitor and evaluate. The Pledge would then mean treating Councillors, Clerks, employees, members of the public, and representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles.

Town and Parish Councils would be contacted to encourage them to sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge within a week of the Committee meeting. The decision would remain with the Town and Parish Councils whether to accept the Pledge and to take it forward.

The Committee welcomed the concept of the Pledge of Civility and Respect and hoped as many Town and Parish Councils would accept as possible irrespective of which Code of Conduct they were signed up to. The costs to sign up and attend the training sessions were relatively low.

The Committee would monitor progress at six monthly intervals whilst continuing to lobby and support the change for improved sanctions.

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Resolved:- (1) That the content of the report and in particular the aims and objectives of the Civility and Respect Pledge and requirements for Town and Parish Councils to sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge be noted.

(2) That all Town and Parish Councils in the Borough be encouraged to sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge.

24. **CODE OF CONDUCT - DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

Consideration was given to the report presented and submitted by the Service Manager which provided guidance to Members in respect of their obligations relating to the Code of Conduct and in particular the use of Personal Data.

The detailed guidance attached to the report provided more specific information as to how Councillors were able to use personal information which they came into possession of in their role as a Councillor and how to avoid breaching data protection requirements. This guidance would be provided to Members and Parish and Town Council Clerks.

The Committee welcomed the guidance and the clarity this provided.

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

(2) That the guidance note be circulated to Members via the Members' Newsletter and forwarded to the Parish and Town Council Clerks.

25. **REVIEW 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.

Reference was made to each related case and recommended outcomes/actions identified were highlighted.

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

26. **REVIEW OF CONCERNS RAISED PURSUANT TO THE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Service Manager, which provided an overview of the Whistleblowing cases which have been received over the past year.

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Particular reference was made to the appendix to the report which set out clearly the description of the concerns received and action taken.

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

27. URGENT BUSINESS

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

28. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee be held on Thursday, 9th March, 2023, commencing at 2.00 p.m. at the Town Hall.