

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on Monday 19 July 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors T Mawston (Chair), S Dean, D Rooney and A Waters

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillors

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

OFFICERS: S Lightwing

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors M Saunders, S Hill, J Rostron, M Storey and S Walker

21/8 **WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read out the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

21/9 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

21/10 **MINUTES- STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the Standards Committee meetings held on 9 October 2019 and 5 July 2021 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

21/11 **STANDARDS COMPLAINTS UPDATE**

The Director of Legal and Governance Services/Monitoring Officer outlined the current process for dealing with standards complaints. A case management recording tool was used to log each complaint and track progress. The Monitoring Officer had oversight of all complaints received and the Council's two Independent Persons were contacted for their views.

It was suggested that in order for the Standards Committee to have an overview of complaints, Legal Services could produce a quarterly performance report to present at regular Committee meetings. Whilst the report would not provide specific details of individual complaints, information in relation to numbers, themes and progress could be shared. A Member suggested that the performance report could include comparative information from statistical neighbours or those with a similar political make-up. Details of the Standards Complaints process were available on the Council's website.

The Council's Values had recently been refreshed and a briefing would be arranged for all Elected Members which would provide an opportunity for further discussion. In respect of Officers, there were behaviours associated with the Values and there was some overlap with the Nolan principles. The Director sought the Committee's support in promoting the Values.

The Director also suggested that in future, the Annual Corporate Complaints Report should be submitted to the Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee rather than the Standards Committee. This would enable separation of powers and responsibilities of the two Committees and the type of complaints and would align with the Council's Strategic Priorities.

AGREED as follows that the:

1. information provided was received and noted.

2. Standards Committee would meet quarterly.
3. Annual Corporate Complaints Report would be submitted to Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee in future.

21/12

REVISED MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

A report of the Director of Legal and Governance Services/Monitoring Officer was presented to update the Committee on proposals for a Revised Members' Code of Conduct to reflect the recommendations on best practice resulting from the Local Government Ethical Standards Committee Review in relation to Standards in Public Life.

The Committee was requested to consider the proposed revised edition of the Members' Code of Conduct and endorse the revised code which would then be submitted to full Council for approval.

The Code applied when Members acted in their role as a Member of the Authority and the most recent version of Middlesbrough's Code was adopted by Council with effect from 1 December 2016.

The Government's Committee on Standards in Public Life undertook a review on Local Government Ethical Standards and produced a report in January 2019. The purpose of the review was for the Committee to assure themselves that the current standards framework was conducive to promoting and maintaining the high standards expected by the public. The Committee made 26 recommendations and identified 15 recommendations of best practice to improve ethical standards in local government. The recommendations included the suggestion for the Local Government Association (LGA) to create an updated Model Code of Conduct to enhance consistency and the quality of local authority codes.

The purpose of Middlesbrough Council's revised Code of Conduct was to:

- Assist Members in modelling their behaviours to those expected of them, and to set out the type of conduct that could lead to action being taken against them.
- Protect Members, the public, fellow councillors, local authority officers and the reputation of local government. It set out general principles of conduct expected of all councillors and specific obligations in relation to standards of conduct.
- Reflect the recommendations on best practice resulting from the Local Government Ethical Standards Committee Review in relation to Standards in Public Life.

The Constitution and Member Development Committee had also been consulted on the proposed revisions and proposed some minor amendments that had been incorporated into this version. A copy of the proposed revised Members' Code of Conduct was attached at Appendix A to the submitted report, with a copy of the Committee for Standards In Public Life recommendations on best practice attached at Appendix B.

It was highlighted that some minor typographical corrections would be made to Appendix A, prior to submission to Council for approval. In relation to the sections relating to Declarations of Interest it was suggested that the Monitoring Officer should add further clarity as to the implications of disclosure or non disclosure.

ORDERED as follows that the:

- Standards Committee endorsed the revised Member's Code of Conduct.
- Monitoring Officer would add further detail to the Code in relation to Declarations of Interest.
- revised Members' Code of Conduct would be submitted to Council for approval.

21/13

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

None.

