

Standards Committee

Thursday, 30 November 2023

Present: Councillor F Lott (Chair)
Councillors T Hallway, B Burdis, D Cox, E Darke and
W Lott

Apologies: Councillors L Bartoli and C Burdis

SC4 /23 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations or dispensations reported.

SC5 /23 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 6 July 2023 be agreed.

SC6 /23 Invitation to Guests: Communication and Media Team

The Committee was informed that a representative of the Communication and Media Team was unable to attend the meeting on this occasion.

SC7 /23 Review of Social Media Training for Elected Members

The Committee received a report outlining the recent training provided to elected members on the use of social media by an external training provider and feedback of attendees.

It was noted that the 2023-24 Action Plan/Work Programme for Standards Committee included an action to support and promote an external training session for all elected members on the use of social media and the risks. The purpose of the training was to promote high standards of conduct.

The social media training had been delivered on 29th November 2023 and the course had been designed at the request of and following consultation with the Chair of Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer.

The Monitoring Officer was in attendance at the meeting and provided some feedback from attendees on the course. Two sessions had been delivered, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. Thirteen members attended across the two sessions. Feedback from the training was positive and members commented that they would feel more confident using social media going forward.

The Chair asked if the possibility of repeating the training could be explored.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

SC8 /23 Monitoring Officer Review and Update

The Committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer which provided his observations with Standards Committee following 7 months of being in post. The report also provided an update on the Monitoring Officer's review of the Authority's Code of Conduct and Local Arrangements following the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's report into the management of a Code of Conduct Complaint at Teignbridge District Council.

The report identified that, since coming into post, it has been a priority for the Monitoring Officer to gain a through knowledge of the standards and governance matters which arose in the Authority in recent years, including the allegations of breaches of the code of conduct and the decisions taken. In all cases reviewed, the Monitoring Officer noted that all decisions had been taken properly, reflecting the facts of those cases, the law and the relevant case law.

The Committee was informed that, following 7 months in the role, the Monitoring Officer is of the view that the ethical governance arrangements within the Authority are fit for purpose in so far as they relate to the conduct of elected members. The Annual Governance Statement Update 2022-2023 which was presented to Audit Committee on 31 May 2023 concluded that there were no significant governance issues identified and that on the whole, the governance arrangements in operation during 2022/23 within the Authority were adequate.

The Committee was provided information relating to a report published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman on 21 December 2022 which upheld a complaint against Teignbridge District Council. The complaint had been made by a Councillor who alleged that the Council was at fault as it failed to follow due process when investigating alleged breaches of its code of conduct for elected members. The report provided a reminder to all local authorities of good practice and the importance of following correct procedure.

In view of this widely reported case, the then Monitoring Officer had requested a review of North Tyneside Council's policy, process and practices in connection with standards complaints. The internal review provided the Chair of Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer an assurance as to current procedures within the Authority.

A Councillor thanked the Monitoring Officer for the support he had provided since his appointment. He also made reference to changes to the Local Government Association model Code of Conduct and model procedures. The Monitoring Officer thanked the Councillor for his comments and stated that changes to the models provided by the Local Government Association would be reviewed and reported back through to the Committee where changes to the Authority's Code of Conduct or Local Arrangements were necessary.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

SC9 /23 Action Plan 2023-24

The Committee received an update on the Action Plan/Work Programme of the Standards

Committee for 2023/24, as adopted by the Committee at its meeting on 6 July 2023.

It was noted that the Action Plan is monitored by the Committee at each meeting and the progress of the identified actions will be reported in the Committee's Annual Report to full Council at the end of the municipal year.

It was noted that one of the actions in the plan was to support the establishment of regular meetings of the 3 Independent Persons together with the Monitoring Officer and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee. A meeting had been arranged for 11 December 2023.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.