

## **STANDARDS AND CONDUCT COMMITTEE**

**FRIDAY, 8TH MARCH, 2019**

**PRESENT:** Councillor E Nash in the Chair

Councillors N Dawson, G Harper,  
P Harrand, M Harrison, Hughes,  
A Hussain, Potter

Independent Member – Gordon Tollefson

### **1 Appeals against refusal of inspection of documents**

There were no appeals.

### **2 Exempt Information - Possible exclusion of the press and public**

There were no exempt items.

### **3 Late items**

There were no late items.

### **4 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **5 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor E Tunnicliffe, and Councillor G Harper was in attendance as substitute.

### **6 Minutes - 9 March 2018**

The minutes of the meeting held 9<sup>th</sup> March 2018 were approved as a correct record.

### **7 Local Government Ethical Standards; A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life - Implications for Leeds**

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support submitted a report that provided a commentary on the recent Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report into Ethical Standards in Local Government. The report considered matters raised in the CSPL report and asked the Standards and Conduct Committee to consider amendments to the existing ethical framework arrangements operating at Leeds City Council.

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support introduced the report, providing an update on Leeds' contribution to the national assessment conducted by the CSPL, and highlighted the key proposed changes in line with best practice as set out in the report.

Members were advised that 26 recommendations have been made by the CSPL to the Government (and others), which will require approval prior to any implementation, and that consultation is anticipated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government with a formal response due by the summer.

Members' attention was also drawn to 15 areas of Best Practice aimed at Local Authorities and against which CSPL will be further benchmarking local authorities in 2020.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- CSPL recognition of some practices already implemented in Leeds, such as the Annual Report to Full Council, and the recommended financial threshold for Gifts and Hospitality that is now contained in the CSPL best practice document.
- The importance of any amendments to Section 27 (2) of the Localism Act 2011 making clear the circumstances where a Member will be construed to be acting, or giving the impression they are acting, in an official capacity and that such a definition should make a clear distinction between activities in a Members private or political life where the Code of Conduct should not apply.
- The Committee was advised that details of gifts and hospitality received by Members were currently made available on their individual Register of Interests on the Council's website. However, the CSPL recommend that a separate publication containing details of all Members' gifts and hospitality should be collated and published in one place on a quarterly basis. Members were supportive of a document being published on a quarterly basis.
- Members were supportive of amendments put forward by the Scrutiny Board Resources and Strategy and proposed by the Monitoring Officer to the social media guidance at Appendix 5. A Member also cautioned about the possible perception of Members endorsing other social media users' comments.

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support confirmed that the observations of the Committee and the amended Social Media Guidance will be communicated to Group Whips. The Parish Council Members present welcomed the idea of a single Members' Code of Conduct for Parish Councils, in line with the Leeds City Council Members' Code of Conduct. The Committee was informed that a Members' Code of Conduct suitable for use across all Councils is currently being developed by the Local Government Association (LGA).

**RESOLVED –**

Draft minutes to be approved at a future meeting

- a) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b) That the Committee recommend to General Purpose Committee that the Member's Code of Conduct be amended to reflect Best Practice 1 & 2 as set out in the submitted report;
- c) That the Committee recommend to General Purposes Committee that the Procedure for Handling Complaints alleging a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct be amended to reflect Best Practice 8 & 11 as set out in the submitted report;
- d) That a separate publication containing details of all Members' gifts and Hospitality should be collated and published in one place on a quarterly basis;
- e) That the amendments to the Guidance for Members on Social Media set out by the Monitoring Officer at Appendix 5 be agreed.

## **8 Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer to the Standards and Conduct Committee**

The City Solicitor submitted a report that presented the work carried out by the Monitoring Officer and her staff to support the Committee throughout the year. The report also demonstrated the ways in which the Authority has fulfilled its statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support introduced the report, highlighting the lower number of complaints for 2018/19 than previous years. Members were also informed of a request following publication of the report, for a Members' home address to be withheld the public. The Monitoring Officer had granted the permission to withhold this information on the grounds of intimidation.

**RESOLVED** – That the contents of the report be noted.

## **9 Annual Report of the Committee to Full Council**

The City Solicitor submitted a report that presented to the Committee an annual report relating to matters within the Committee's terms of reference and asked Members to refer the report to full Council for consideration.

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support introduced the report, advising Members that the report would be amended to reflect the additional permission to withhold details of a Members' address, as described during consideration of the previous item.

**RESOLVED** –

- a) That the draft Annual Report to Full Council at Appendix 1 be agreed;
- b) That the Annual Report at Appendix 1 be referred to Full Council for consideration.

*The meeting ended at 2:55pm.*