

STANDARDS AND CONDUCT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 8TH MARCH, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor J Dowson in the Chair
Councillors P Alderson, B Gettings,
A Scopes and M Swards

INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and welcomed the newly appointed Independent Member, Claire McManus to her first meeting of the Standards and Conduct Committee. The Chair also wished Gordon Tollefson a speedy recovery after his recent operation.

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 formal late items.

4 Declaration of Interests

No interests were raised.

5 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor, Downes, Grahame and Councillor Stephenson. Gordon Tollefson was also unable to attend the meeting.

6 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held Monday, 14th March 2022, be approved as an accurate record and the consultative notes of the meeting held on Friday, 10th March 2023 be noted.

7 Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer to the Standards and Conduct Committee

The City Solicitor submitted a report that presented an overview of the work carried out by the Monitoring Officer and her staff to support the Committee throughout the year.

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report, highlighted the following key areas: -

- It was noted that Members of the authority and Parish and Town Councils have met their obligations in notifying any disclosable pecuniary interests within 28 days of a change in circumstance relating to such interests.
- In relation to sensitive interests, there has been no change in the treatment of addresses.
- In terms of dispensations, no further requests have been submitted to the Head of Paid Service.
- No changes are proposed to the complaint procedure this year. It was confirmed that 12 complaints were received in respect of Leeds City Council Members last year, and this has reduced to 5 complaints this Municipal Year.
- Last year the Monitoring Officer report 9 complaints relating to Parish and Town Councillors in the Leeds area. This Municipal Year, the Monitoring Officer has received 1 complaint relating to Town and Parish Councillors in the Leeds area.
- Mr Tollefson's term of office has been extended to July 2026. His assistance throughout the year work is acknowledged.

A member sought clarity on the complaint process and the involvement of elected members during this process. The member requested that additional information is added in relation to some more background context on the detail of the complaint. The City Solicitor explained that the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the delegation powers as set out in the Council's Constitution delegates Standards and Conduct Committee work to the City Solicitor. It was reported that in Leeds, generally, complaints do not reach further than a Stage 1 complaint, during which an Independent Person is consulted as part of the procedure. If a complaint reached Stage 2, the Chair of the Standards and Conduct Committee would be consulted as part of the procedure. Were a complaint to reach Stage 3, members of the Committee would be involved in dealing with the complaint. Independent Persons are appointed and consulted as part of the oversight of the process.

In responding to a question regarding the 'need' for the Standards and Conduct Committee to meet, it was confirmed that it is a requirement of best practice that the Committee meets at least once per year. Additionally, it was noted that the lack of issues presented to the Standards and Conduct Committee, is a testament to the standards of conduct that Leeds City Council members abide by.

However, Officers agreed to add further contextual information to future reports whilst also preserving the anonymity of complainants and subject members.. Further to this, members confirmed that they were content with the process as it stands, and the explanations / clarity provided by officers.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the submitted report, together with the comments arising from the Committee’s discussion, be noted.

8 Annual Report of the Standards and Conduct Committee

The City Solicitor submitted a report presenting for Members’ consideration the Annual Report of the Standards and Conduct Committee which provided an overview of the key areas of activity which had been undertaken over the past year from within the Committee’s terms of reference.

In presenting the report, the Head of Democratic Services highlighted that following consideration and approval by the Committee, the Annual Report would be submitted to Full Council in March for consideration as required.

The Chair added that she is thankful for the team who arrange the comprehensive member training regime, and to ensure the appropriate safeguards are in place.

RESOLVED – To:

- a) Approve the draft Annual Report (as attached at Appendix 1) and
- b) Support the Chair in presenting the Annual Report to full Council.