

STANDARDS AND CONDUCT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 6TH MARCH, 2020

PRESENT: Councillor E Nash in the Chair

Councillors N Dawson, P Grahame,
P Harrand, M Harrison, A Hutchison, D
Potter and P Wray

Independent Person – 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 or other interests.

5 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors E Tunnicliffe, A Hussain and B Gettings. Councillors P Wray and A Hutchison were in attendance as substitutes.

6 Minutes - 8 March 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held 8th March 2019 be approved as an accurate record.

7 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 following were in attendance:

- Catherine Witham, City Solicitor
- Andy Hodson, Head of Democratic Services

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report, highlighting the following:

- As part of the review of the Member Development Strategy, Members were advised that work is ongoing to strengthen Ethical Framework training across the Council.
- The current number of Leeds City Council members who have had their interests withheld from the public register due to threats to their safety had risen from 7 in 2018/19, to 21 (20 at the time of agenda publication) in 2019/20. In the main, home addresses had been removed from registers. Members were advised that the Local Government Association (LGA) are developing further guidance around intimidation in public life, in response to the increase of incidents across local government.
- To address heightened concerns around the safety of elected members in Leeds, the Member Safety Task Force had been established, and a report providing an update on the work of the group is due to be submitted to the Member Management Committee meeting scheduled for 24 March 2020.
- Following Parish and Town Council elections in May 2019, steps have been taken to ensure that clerks are prepared to support new Members to complete their registers of interests at the earliest opportunity.

The City Solicitor also wished for her thanks to Independent Member, Gordon Tollefson, to be noted, for his invaluable contributions throughout the year.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- In response to a query in relation to the number of complaints received in comparison to other West Yorkshire authorities, Members were advised that legislation does not oblige local authorities to publish such information, and therefore details are not ordinarily publically available. A separate note would be circulated following the meeting with comparative data, along with details of informal complaints that do not proceed to the formal process.
- Members noted the absence of addresses on ballot papers at the general election in December 2019. The Committee was advised that the legislation currently differentiates between local and general elections, and was assured that officers continue to pursue the matter with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b) That the details requested during discussions be circulated following the meeting.

8 Annual Report of the Committee to Full Council

The City Solicitor submitted a report presenting to the committee an annual report relating to matters within the committee's terms of reference, requesting that Members refer the report to full Council for consideration.

The following were in attendance:

- Catherine Witham, City Solicitor
- Andy Hodson, Head of Democratic Services

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report, noting the requirement for the Committee to report annually to full Council.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the draft Annual Report to Full Council at Appendix 1 be approved, subject to minor amendments;
- b) That the Annual Report at Appendix 1 be referred to full Council for consideration.

The meeting ended at 10:30 a.m.