

CONSULTATIVE MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 10TH MARCH, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor L Mulherin in the Chair

Councillors D Cohen, P Harrand,
A Scopes, D Seary, M Swards, and
E Taylor

Independent Person – Mr G Tollefson

Co-opted Parish Council Member – Councillor D Potter

STATUS OF MEETING

With the agreement of the Chair and due to severe weather conditions, the meeting took place as a remote consultative meeting rather than a physical meeting. As such, it was noted that the consultative nature of the meeting did not allow for formal decisions to be made but did allow for the committee to make recommendations on the agenda items as contained within the published agenda pack.

1 Appeals against refusal of inspection of documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

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

Members did not declare any interests.

5 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor R Downes and Councillor P Grahame. The Head of Democratic Services also conveyed the City Solicitor's apologies to the meeting.

6 Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 14 March 2022

RECOMMENDED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held Monday, 14th March 2022 be approved at a future meeting as an accurate record.

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

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report of the City Solicitor with a summary of the work carried out by the Monitoring Officer and her staff to support the Committee throughout the year.

Appended (Appendix 1) to the report included a copy of the report from the Monitoring Officer.

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and provided members with an update on the following:

- Summary of changes to the Councillor Code of Conduct following the Annual Council meeting in May 2022.
- All Members of the authority and of Parish and Town Councils met their obligation to notify any disclosable pecuniary interests within 28 days of election.
- All out parish council elections taking place in May 2023 will be a significant undertaking for officers.
- Sensitive interests. The Monitoring Officer has facilitated all requests from Members for home address details to be redacted from the public register of interests.
- Summary of complaints. 7 complaints assessed with officers compared to 12 from the previous year. 3 parish and town council complaints compared with 7 from the previous year. The Monitoring Officer has recommended minor changes to the complaints procedure (as detailed in Annex 1)
- The newly appointed Independent Person Claire McManus commences her role from 1st April 2023.
- Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review positive in respect of the council's arrangements.

In response to a query regarding signposting following a complaint, it was confirmed that cases are determined on a case by case basis and complainants may be directed to other routes.

The Chair referred to the LGA Peer Review and commended the council on the Peer Review's findings about the strength of cross party working, the high standards of behaviour and conduct embedded across the council and about the "mature, transparent and constructive" relationship between councillors and officers.

Additionally, in terms of Recommendation 6, the Chair suggested that a cumulative or individual figure be referenced in relation to the requirement to record gifts and hospitality received. The Committee broadly supported this approach in acknowledging the benefits of identifying an individual figure for the year. Members were informed that suggestions to amend the Code of Conduct need to be considered at General Purposes Committee before being

agreed at a Full Council meeting. The Chair suggested that this be something for the successor Committee to consider and determine.

RECOMMENDED – To note the contents of the report, together with the comments arising from the Committee’s discussion and that the amendments for clarification to the Complaint Procedure as recommended by the City Solicitor be supported.

8 Annual Report of the Standards and Conduct Committee

The report of the City Solicitor presented the annual report of the Standards and Conduct Committee relating to matters within the committee’s terms of reference.

Appended (Appendix 1) to the report included the draft annual report of the Standards and Conduct Committee.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that due to the meeting changing to a remote meeting, members are provided with the opportunity to consult on the annual report and the Chair of the Standards and Conduct Committee will present the report on behalf of the Committee at the upcoming Council meeting.

Further to the annual report under the sub-heading ‘Complaints relating to Leeds City Councillors’, a member suggested that the term for elected members be referred to as either ‘City Councillors’ or ‘Council Members’ as this may come across as confusing. Additionally, it was requested that additional details on who assesses complaints be included.

The Chair reiterated the positive position in terms of the number of complaints received as well as welcoming the new Independent Person, Claire McManus to commence her role on 1 April 2023.

Gordon Tollefson also highlighted the positive work across the city and limited number of complaints received in comparison to many smaller local authorities, reflecting the work of councillors and officers. Gordon thanked the Committee and commented on the support he will provide Claire when she commences her role as Independent Person.

RECOMMENDED –

- a) To note the Annual Report of the Standards and Conduct Committee, and amendments suggested by Members.
- b) To support the Chair in presenting the Annual Report as amended on behalf of the committee at the Council meeting.

(The meeting concluded at 10:32)