

Minutes of the Meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 22 February 2022

PRESENT -

Councillor Liz Frost (Chairman); Councillor Alex Coley (Vice-Chair); Councillors Kate Chinn, Hannah Dalton, Previn Jagutpal and David Reeve

In Attendance: Councillor Christine Howells (virtually)

Absent: Councillor Eber Kington

Officers present: Gillian McTaggart (Head of Corporate Assurance) and Tim Richardson (Democratic Services Manager)

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in relation to Items of business to be discussed at the meeting.

6 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the previous Meeting of the Standards Committee held on 16 June 2021 were agreed as a true record and the Committee authorised the Chairman to sign them.

7 REVIEW OF CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

The Committee received a report providing an update on complaints made under the Code of Conduct for Members from 1/1/2021 to 1/01/2022 and the steps taken to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Vexatious complaints.** Members noted the difficulty in managing vexatious complaints, as identified in paragraph 2.8 of the report, and requested further information on how this could be approached. The possibility of introducing a protocol on the management of vexatious complaints was raised. It was noted that the Monitoring Officer would be requested to provide an explanation of the issues around vexatious complaints and the protections available to Members following the meeting.

- b) **Code of conduct training.** Following a question from a Member of the Committee it was noted that the Local Government Association's (LGA) model Councillor Code of Conduct would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration. Training on the Council's existing Code of Conduct was included in the Member Development and Induction Programme and refreshed training would be provided if the Council adopted the Model Code of Conduct.
- c) **Civility in public life.** A member of the Committee expressed the view that the Council should provide a statement of its expectations of civility in public life, which would make clear the action which the Council would pursue in response to vexatious complaints against Councillors.
- d) **Visibility of Code of Conduct on Council's website.** The Committee noted that the location of the Code of Conduct and related information on the Council's website would be reviewed once the Committee had considered the LGA's model Councillor Code of Conduct.
- e) **Personal safety.** The Committee discussed matters relating to personal safety and lone working of Councillors. It was noted that these would be considered for inclusion in the work plan of the Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Note there have been no complaints between 1 January 2021 to the 1 January 2022;**
- (2) **Note there was one self-referral under the Code of Conduct between 1 January 2021 and 1 January 2022; which did not lead to an investigation.**
- (3) **Agreed that they had considered the actions to be taken to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and ensure complaints are managed properly.**

8 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2021 - 2022

The Committee received a report presenting the updated work plan for 2021-2022.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Planning Code of Practice.** It was noted that officers would review the work previously undertaken on the Planning Code of Practice and identify a date for its consideration by the Committee in consultation with the Chair.
- b) **External Support.** A member of the Committee asked whether the Council was continuing to work with the Local Government Association and Centre for Governance and Scrutiny on the review of the Constitution. It was noted that an update would be circulated following the meeting.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Note and agree the ongoing work plan for 2021- 2022 as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.**

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 7.56 pm

COUNCILLOR LIZ FROST (CHAIRMAN)