

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 28 JANUARY 2022
--

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY, 28 JANUARY 2022 AT 1100 HOURS IN COMMITTEE ROOM C, COUNCIL HOUSE EXTENSION, 6 MARGARET ST, BIRMINGHAM

PRESENT: - Mr Peter Wiseman in the Chair;

Councillor Deirdre Alden, Stephen Atkinson, Alastair Cowan, Councillor Peter Fowler, Steven Jonas, Councillor Carl Rice and Councillor Mike Ward.

ALSO PRESENT: -

Raymond Tomkinson, Independent Person
Rob Connelly, Assistant Director - Governance

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 12 Members were reminded that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and non pecuniary interests relating to any items of business to be discussed at this meeting. If a pecuniary interest was declared a Member must not speak or take part in that agenda item. Any declarations would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

No interests were declared.

APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEE

- 13 It was noted that Councillor Mike Ward has been appointed by City Council on 2 November 2021 to the Committee, filling the vacancy, for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of City Council in May 2022.

APOLOGIES

- 14 Apologies were received from New Frankley Parish Councillor Ian Bruckshaw, and Councillor Julie Johnson White, Mohammed Khan and Councillor Paul Tilsley for their inability to attend the meeting.

It was noted that the two Parish Councillors were not in attendance and did not engage with the process. Officers undertook to contact the Clerks to the respective Parish Councils.

MEMBER TRAINING AND INDUCTION UPDATE

The following report of the Assistant Director - Governance was submitted:-

(See document No 1)

The Assistant Director of Governance made introductory comments relating to the report and responded to Members questions.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were made:-

- Members must attend training. In other Authorities training was mandatory.
- The priorities for training would include things such as the Member Code of conduct, social media use, financial and training for Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet members.
- As a body of people Members were not like a workforce and training should be provided to meet the needs of individuals. Some Members had full time jobs so could only train in the evenings. Some preferred face to face others on-line.
- Training could be undertaken in a 4 year rolling programme with suitable refresher training included. This would prevent overloading Members with training.
- Members sitting on some Committees such as Planning and Licensing were required to undertake training on the roles of those Committees and in respect of licensing Subs could not sit until they had received the training.
- Low attendance at training was a concern. Should training be linked to the basic allowance or make public who had undertaken training to improve attendance.
- Was pre-election training for those people standing for election needed and if so, how could that be provided.
- The continued training of longer serving and experienced Members should not be overlooked.
- Party Groups did have a role in training of Members. They decided which roles their members were to have on the Council. For new members there should be a formalised robust buddy system in place.

It was agreed that the Chair of Standards Committee would write to the Group Secretaries as well as individual Members reminding them of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct prior to the elections in May.

- (i) That the report be noted; and
- (ii) that the Chair of Standards Committee write to the Group Secretaries as well as individual Members reminding them of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct prior to the elections in May 2022.

UPDATE ON COUNCILLORS COMPLAINTS FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2021 TO DECEMBER 2021

The following report of the Assistant Director of Governance was submitted:-

(See document No 2)

The Assistant Director of Governance made introductory comments relating to the report.

The Chair note that this report related back to the other report and he hoped that the training after May would help reduce the number of complaints. Alastair Cowan suggested that 27 complaints did not appear to be high given the number of Councillors on the Council. He queried if an analysis of previous years could be provided. The Assistant Director of Governance indicated that he would consider that. The Chair noted that an annual report of Ombudsman complaints was to be submitted to the Committee.

Councillor Peter Fowler commented on the complaints of a Councillor's failure to respond to a constituent's query and noted that it took time for departments to respond to the Councillors query before they could reply to the constituent.

Raymond Tomkinson, Independent Person, noted that there was no clear guidance on the time scale for Councillors to respond to constituents. He indicated that he supported the last 2 paragraphs of the report as there was a risk of a greater number of complaints in the run up to the elections.

16

RESOLVED:-

That the report be noted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair was of the opinion that the following matter could be considered as a matter of urgency in view of need to expedite consideration thereof and instruct officer if necessary:-

A. Date of Next meetings

17

The Assistant Director of Governance indicated that he was planning to arrange a meeting of the Committee in late March 2022.

B. Matter Raised in Private at the Last meeting

- 18 Raymond Tomkinson, Independent Person, queried if the Assistant Director – Legal was going to update the Committee on the matter raised in the private section of the last meeting. The Assistant Director of Governance indicated that he would take that matter up with the Interim City Solicitor
-

AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

- 19 **RESOLVED: -**

‘In an urgent situation between meetings, the Chairman jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee’.

The meeting ended at 1240 hours.

CHAIRMAN