

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 29 October 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Brenda Dacres, Colin Elliott, Simon Hooks, Pauline Morrison, Andre Bourne, Paul Bell and Jim Mallory.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Obajimi Adefiranye, Councillor Alan Hall and Councillor Hilary Moore.

1. Declaration of interests

None was declared.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Committee meetings held on the 20 May 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. COMPLIANCE WITH MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT 2015

Kath Nicholson, Head of Law and Monitoring Officer, presented the report and explained that the report provides information about the extent of compliance with the Member Code of Conduct.

The Committee was informed that since the last report there have been two complaints raised against members. Both complaints were resolved informally in one case by the member concerned providing a public apology to the complainant and in the other the complainant decided not to pursue the complaint.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

4. Review of Whistle blowing Policy

Kath Nicholson, Head of Law and Monitoring Officer introduced the report and explained the proposed revised Whistle blowing policy followed a request from the Committee at its last meeting that it be fundamentally reviewed.

It was explained that the proposed policy followed a review of the policies of a number of other local authorities both in and outside of London by the Head of Law.

It was explained that the whistle blowing policy is intended to be used as a supplement to other avenues of complaint where such procedures would not enable matters to be investigated.

Under the revised policy it was proposed that any serious concerns a complainant may have about any aspect of service provision, the conduct of

officers, members or others acting on behalf of the Council be reported under the policy. However where there are more appropriate channels for investigation the Monitoring Officer will direct the complainant to that channel.

It was further explained that the proposed policy will require the Head of Law or her deputy to personally conduct an initial review of all complaints. This will enable her to be in a position to advise whether the complaint should be investigated and if so how, with potential timescales.

A further proposed change to the existing policy was the introduction of a requirement to notify complainants and to keep them regularly informed where an investigation was not likely to be completed within the expected 28 day period.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the written comments received from an absent Independent member suggesting that updates on the progress of an investigation should be appropriately determined dependent on the nature of the complaint and required investigation. It was agreed that updates be provided normally within 28 days and thereafter every 3 months.

It was further explained that as a management tool a register and spread sheet of referrals be introduced and regularly monitored to ensure that all referrals are dealt with in the most timely and appropriate manner.

It was suggested that a step by step guide (flowchart) be considered for inclusion in the revised policy.

It was further suggested that at paragraph 7.1 the Head of Law's contact details should be inserted.

The Committee expressed particular interest in the publicity of the revised policy. The Head of Law confirmed that she would have discussions with the Head of Communications ensuring that there is clarity on the Council's website as to the policy and its application. It was also suggested and agreed that the revised policy be placed on the Council's intranet.

The Head of Law also confirmed that she would be providing training to all service heads on the revised policy with the expectation that this is then cascaded throughout the Council. In the future as well as reporting to the Standards Committee, the annual report will also be submitted to the Council's Executive Management Team to ensure the highest officer level support.

The Committee was also informed that a briefing on the whistleblowing policy also formed part of the Council's induction arrangements.

RESOLVED that the proposed amended whistleblowing policy appearing at Appendix 2 and the measures for its operation set out in the report be agreed.

5. STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2016

Kath Nicholson, Head of Law and Monitoring Officer presented the item and

invited the Committee to comment.

RESOLVED that the work programme shown in paragraph 3.3 be agreed.

6. INFORMATION ITEM - Oral Report back on whistle blowing referral

Kath Nicholson provided an oral report back on the whistle blowing referral which was discussed at the previous meeting but which had not been concluded at that time. The Head of Law, Kath Nicholson confirmed that since the previous meeting she had met with the complainant and had obtained further information about the complaint.

The Independent Executive Board (IEB) at the school had now conducted a thorough investigation and had prepared a comprehensive and full report. Save for some recommendations in relation to improved HR practice within the school they concluded that they could find no evidence to support the complainant's contentions and in the circumstances proposed no further action.

7. INFORMATION ITEM Oral Report - Resignation of Independent Member

The Committee was informed that Hannah Le Vay had resigned as an Independent Member of the Standards Committee. The Committee requested that its recognition and appreciation of Hannah's membership be formally recorded.

The meeting ended at 8:15pm