

# MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22 November 2018 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Walton, Roper-Newman, Sullivan, Thomas, Obajimi Adefiranye, Andre Bourne, Caroline Kalu, Jim Mallory and Joan Millbank

ALSO PRESENT: Joy Walton, David Roper-Newman, Cathy Sullivan and Leslie Thomas.

Apologies for absence were received from Fasil Bhatti, Gill Butler, Councillor Bill Brown, Councillor Colin Elliott, Councillor Alex Feis-Bryce and Councillor Hilary Moore.

## 10. Declaration of interests

None were made.

## 11. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## 12. Annual Complaints Report 2017-18

The Head of Public Services presented the report which provided performance information for 2017/18 on complaints dealt with by the Council and its housing partners at Stages 1 and 2 of the Corporate Complaints procedure and complaints and enquiries to the Mayor, Councillors and MPs logged on the Council's complaints management system during 2017-18. It was explained that the new complaints process is now in place and there is now more senior oversight than was previously the case. The new case work system went live in April 2018 and the initial feedback is generally good.

There was further discussion on the possible merit in adopting the Ombudsman's definition of complaint. It was suggested that the Council is doing itself a disservice in not adopting the Ombudsman's narrow definition of complaints. It was suggested that over 5,000 referrals seemed excessive and potentially drains the Council of resources. It appeared that some of the referrals are simply enquiries, not an actual complaint about service provision. It was noted that there is a danger that such requests could simply disappear if not captured as a complaint.

The Head of Public Services responded that it was previously the case that the Council was criticised for under recording complaints. The approach now taken by the Council is that if someone feels the need to contact the Council, Chief Executive or service provider then such individual is unhappy and the Council's position is that it would rather get the right outcome than to seek to reduce numbers.

It was commented that the number of councillors using the new complaints

casework system requires to be addressed and for such use to be increased. The Head of Public Services explained that some sessions have been provided previously for councillors. He further explained that before the Council meeting next week there will be a stand showcasing the new Council website and there will be someone available to talk to councillors about the new case work system.

The LGO letter expressed some concern about the speed of responses and delay in making a response. The Head of Public Services explained that he met with the Ombudsman late last year and confirmed that the relationship between the LGO and the Council has significantly improved.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

### **13. Whistleblowing Review**

The Head of Law/Monitoring Officer introduced the report and explained this is an annual report considered by the Committee and provides an opportunity for members to note referrals and to consider and suggest any changes. The Head of Law/Monitoring Officer provided the Committee with an update on the 13 whistleblowing referrals received since the last review.

In response to a request for additional information in relation to Case Z the Head of Law/Monitoring Officer confirmed that the matter had been referred to the police who were investigating the matter of a malicious communication.

The Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer confirmed that provided there is enough information for an investigation, matters will be investigated regardless of their origin.

There was a suggestion that there could be a summary of the key stages of an investigation to confirm the process entered into. It was commented that this was a very effective procedure and despite it capturing a lot of disparate issues, it appears to be working well.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

### **14. Review of compliance with Member Code of Conduct**

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

The Head of Law/Monitoring Officer confirmed there have been two complaints raised against members since consideration of the previous report on compliance with the Member Code of Conduct in October 2017. In one case informal resolution was suggested however due to delays in response such a resolution was no longer feasible. An initial assessment was conducted and the decision reached that it was no longer in the public interest to proceed to further investigation.

The other complaint related to a complaint about service standards which should properly be considered under the Council's Corporate Complaints procedures. The element of the complaint relating to the member's conduct did not constitute a breach under the Member Code of Conduct even if proven. The Head of Law/Monitoring Officer responded accordingly.

It was commented that the report demonstrates a high level of compliance.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 8:30pm