

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 5 August 2020 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Obajimi Adefiranye, Tauseef Anwar, Andre Bourne, Bill Brown, Patrick Codd, Sue Hordijkeno, Jim Mallory, Hilary Moore, Pauline Morrison and Olurotimi Ogunbadewa.

ALSO PRESENT: Joy Walton, Fasil Bhatti, Gill Butler, David Roper-Newman, Cathy Sullivan and Leslie Thomas

4. Declaration of interests

There were no declarations.

5. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on January 8 2020 and July 15 2020 be confirmed and signed as correct records.

6. Consultation on The Local Government Association's Draft Member Model Code of Conduct

The report was introduced by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, who gave a slideshow presentation to the Committee. (copy filed with the minutes).

The Committee reviewed the draft Local Government Association Model Member Code of Conduct. The Committee wholeheartedly welcomed the review and the opportunity to provide input into the consultation.

The Committee generally endorsed the recommendations of the LGA; but, with a number of caveats. Comments made are reproduced below using relevant headings from the draft model code:-

Presumption of acting in an official capacity.

- The Committee noted this recommendation would require legislative change.
- The Committee believed greater clarification was required.
- The use of social media in particular, had made it difficult to see clear boundaries between when Councillors were acting as private individuals and when "deemed to be representing their] Council.
- This can be a "grey area"
- "If people know you are a Councillor, whether or not you are acting in that capacity, the public will associate you with the Council. A presumption of

‘acting in an official capacity’ was important for lay people and therefore the potential for bringing the Council into disrepute. The public rarely make a distinction.”

- “As a Councillor, I am uncomfortable that everything we do is deemed to be as a Councillor and so this would require further clarification. Across the Country, there appeared to be no clear conclusion on this.”
- “As a Councillor, we are under scrutiny and that includes our private life as well.”
- “Social media does mean we need to be alert to the dangers of social media and the need to have special attention given to it.”

‘Disclosable Pecuniary Interests’

The Committee noted the specific recommendation would require legislative amendment and were generally supportive of the disclosure of interests section.

‘Gifts and hospitality’

The Committee suggested that perhaps an annual review of the limit of £25 from a single source could be added. Members agreed the cumulative figure from a single source of £100 would be a good idea.

Sanctions

Concern was expressed that withdrawal of facilities could be a problem if Councillors are then unable to fulfil their role to support residents on casework. Members were not happy that there is was no right of appeal.

Civility

The Committee noted it is more important to have ‘respect’. You can be polite and civil but be disrespectful in general attitude.”

General observations upon the draft Model Code:-

- The draft model code from the LGA was largely endorsed and welcomed.
- It is disappointing as a draft as it needs more framing of the context in which Councillors are acting, in the public interest and the public responsibility. It does not appear to reflect the Nolan principles in the Code.
- The context in which Councillors were acting is very important and the Code was not proactive on ethical standards. It appeared negative in tone and over emphasized the negatives, rather than being proactive. The reasons for having the Code did not seem strong enough.

The Committee and all Independent Members present agreed the Chair should write to the LGA reflecting the various views which had been

expressed.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer agree a written response with the Committee's decision and send this to the LGA before the 17 August 2020.