

Minutes of the Standards and Ethics Committee

Lakeview Room, County Hall, Worcester

Wednesday, 18 October 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Steve Mackay

Independent Members: Dr M Mylechreest and Dr P Whiteman

Also attended:

Independent Person: Raymond Needham

Available papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated); and
- B. The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2023 (previously circulated).

Cllr David Chambers, Vice-Chairman in the Chair

313 Apologies and Named Substitutes (Agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllrs Dan Boatright-Greene, Bob Brookes, Dan Morehead, Mike Rouse and Tom Wells.

Cllr Tony Miller substituted for Cllr Bob Brookes.

314 Declarations of Interest (Agenda item 2)

None.

315 Public Participation (Agenda item 3)

None.

316 Confirmation of Minutes (Agenda item 4)

Standards and Ethics Committee Wednesday, 18 October 2023
Date of Issue: 14 December 2023

RESOLVED that the meeting held on 16 March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

317 Members Register of Interests (Agenda item 5)

The Committee considered the Members Register of Interests.

Hazel Best, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance introduced the report and commented that following the adoption of the LGA Model Code of Conduct by Council on 18 May, Ordinary Registerable Interests should now be included in members register of interests. All councillors would be reminded to update their register of interests accordingly.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- In response to a query, Hazel Best confirmed that all district councils in the county had adopted the model LGA Code of Conduct albeit with some minor changes in some cases mainly in relation to the amount to be declared for gifts and hospitality
- Would it be appropriate for a membership of a sports club or church association to be declared/registered by a member if an application for a council grant had been made by that organisation. Hazel Best responded that a key consideration for a councillor was the public perception of whether there might be a potential conflict of interest. These issues could be complicated so she would encourage councillors to raise the issue with officers in advance of the relevant meeting
- The requirement to update the register of interests was not always at the forefront of members considerations therefore a reminder to do so was important. Hazel Best commented that an annual reminder to members might be beneficial. A member of the Committee suggested that a 6-monthly reminder might be more appropriate.

RESOLVED that the Members Register of Interests be updated so that it is in line with the Members Code of Conduct adopted at the Council meeting on 18 May 2023.

318 Member Code of Conduct Training (Agenda item 6)

The Committee considered the Member Code of Conduct Training.

Hazel Best, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance introduced the report and commented that all councillors received training on the Code of Conduct as part of their induction process. However, it was considered best practice to undertake annual member training sessions. Following the adoption of the model Code, training sessions would be rolled out before March 2024.

Dependent on the views of this Committee, these sessions could be in person, on Teams or in the evening if necessary. Thereafter she intended to roll out an annual training programme focussing on particular key issues.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- It was important that the training sessions provided were as accessible as possible. Attendance might be higher if sessions were held via Teams
- Could attendance at training be made mandatory? Hazel Best responded that that was a matter for this Committee and group leaders to agree
- In response to a query about members being unwilling to comply with the Code, Hazel Best explained that there was a limited range of sanctions available including a public apology but it was no longer possible to suspend a councillor
- There was a danger that a restrictive approach to member training would discourage involvement. However, ignorance was not an excuse if a member had been offered training
- It was important that any newly elected councillor following a by-election received the appropriate training
- Could the planned training session include parish councillors? Hazel Best explained that the training of parish councillors was a matter for the district councils. She would liaise with district council colleagues to determine whether any combined training could be arranged with parish councils.

RESOLVED that a programme of training on the Members Code of Conduct be arranged with the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance being responsible for providing it.

319 Work Programme (Agenda item 7)

The Committee considered the Work programme.

Hazel Best, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance introduced the report and commented that the outcome of the review of the Member/ Officer Relations Protocol would be reported to this Committee in January 2024, before consideration at the Audit and Governance Committee in March with a final decision being taken by Council in May as part of the review of the Council's constitution.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- In response to a query, Hazel Best indicated that as part of the review of the Member/ Officer Relations Protocol, examples of best practice from the LGA as well as other local authorities would be examined
- The Member/ Officer Relations Protocol was not easily accessible on the Council's website. Hazel Best indicated that the Protocol could be found on the web site as part of the Council's constitution
- The Committee welcomed the addition of the work programme as a standard item on the agenda
- Hazel Best undertook to recruit an Independent Member to fill the vacancy on the Committee.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 10.45am.

Chairman