

Public Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held on 16 July 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Cathy Kent (Chair), Barry Johnson (Vice-Chair), Deborah Arnold and Martin Kerin

Charles Clarke, Co-Opted Member

Apologies: Councillors John Allen, Sue Shinnick
Jasdip Singh Nijjar, Co-Opted Member

In attendance: Daniel Fenwick, Executive Director Corporate Services/
Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

2. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Terms of Reference

Members noted the terms of reference and made the following points:

- Point 1.7 – Members agreed there needed to be more information available on the status of complaints ie. any follow up action, what actions took place, timescales. It was agreed that the ethical framework report going forward would provide information on the status of complaints and how these were handled.
- Members agreed the committee should look at the culture aspects of the council, whether persons act in a way that was contrary to the culture of the council and how the council could enforce such changes in line with the culture of the organisation.
- Agreed the purpose of the ethical framework was to identify issues that the committee may wish to discuss.
- Areas suggested could be (1) Member/Officer Protocol (2) culture of civility towards each other and (3) identify where/what training was required.

Charles Clarke joined the meeting at 7.05pm.

4. Ethical Framework Update Report

The report presented set out those gifts and hospitality and declaration of interest declared at meetings by Councillors for the period May 2023 to May 2024 and updated the Committee on complaints received since January 2024.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Pecuniary interests and what should be declared at meetings. Members agreed more clarity would be helpful and the Monitoring Officer agreed to bring forward proposals.
- Members were informed the council, following any recommendations from the Standards Committee, set the gift and hospitality value at £50.
- The Monitoring Officer advised that other authorities fixed the value at £25 but £50 was a reasonable amount.
- Whether members were required to disclose gifts and hospitalities that did not relate to their role as a Councillor. The monitoring officer advised they were not required to do so.
- It was suggested that gifts and hospitalities of family members should be recorded.
- The monitoring officer reminded the committee of the complaints process under the Code of Conduct and that only complaints on the Council's form would be accepted.
- It was suggested to agree a protocol for the monitoring officer in respect of handling of complaints.
- Noted that only half of the members attended the code of conduct training in May 2024. The monitoring officer advised that engagement was good at the session and additional training would be provided over the year.
- It was suggested that there could be different levels of training for new and more experienced members, which would cover different needs and provide specific training on specific issues.

The meeting went into exempt session at 7.42pm.

The meeting reconvened into public session at 7.58pm

Action:

- Monitoring officer agreed to review the code of conduct and complaints procedure as part of the Constitution review taking on board the comments raised by the committee.
- The Complaints Log to be updated to provide members with more information, ie. current status of a complaint; nature of complaint; context of complaint; what action, if any, was taken; more specific details of the complaint; the monitoring officer's actions; timescales of complaints.

- Item to be added to the work programme on Protocols.
- Item to be added to the work programme on Culture.
- The monitoring officer would review and update the work programme for the committee.

Recommendations

- 1.1 Noted the list of gifts and hospitalities declared for the period May 2023 to May 2024 and commented on the process for great transparency and accountability for gifts and hospitality set out in paragraph 2.6.**
- 1.2 Noted the declaration of interests made at meetings for the period May 2023 to 2024.**
- 1.3 Noted the update on the Code of Conduct complaints received and Members requested changes to be made to this complaints log to ensure more detailed and informative data was being provided.**

5. Sensitive Members Interests - Guidance Note

The report presented set out the guidance and advice relating to the declaration of sensitive interests by Members following correspondence from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities in March 2024. It also updated the committee on recent additions to the Register of Interest following the 2024 local elections.

Points arising:

- Members agreed that it was sad this was the route the council were now having to take.
- Consider redaction of member's place of work addresses.

Actions:

- Democratic Services to arrange the publication of the Guidance Note.
- The monitoring officer to consider guidance on the redaction of workplaces of members and their spouse.

Recommendations

- 1.1 Agreed the guidance note of the Monitoring Officer in relation to the exclusion or disclosure of sensitive member interests, as set out in appendix 2.**

- 1.2 The guidance note would be published on the Council's website to strengthen transparency and all Members would be written to by the Monitoring Officer to make them aware of the guidance.
- 1.3 Noted the addition of the new Member interests listed in 2.3, of which the Monitoring Officer had reviewed and accepted.

6. Work Programme

The work programme will be updated to reflect comments made by Members.

A full recording of this meeting can be viewed from the following link:

[Standards Committee - Tuesday 16 July 2024, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 8.19 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk