

Minutes of Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

**Tuesday 7 November 2023 at 6:23pm
in Committee Room 2, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Allcock (Chair)
Councillors Crompton, J Giles, Hemingway, Muflihi, Rahman
and Trumpeter.

Officers: Surjit Tour (Director of Law and Governance – Monitoring
Officer), Vanessa Mahersmith (Legal Services Manager),
Sulaiman Ismail (Solicitor), Trisha Newton (Deputy Manager
- Democratic Services), and Johane Gandiwa (Committee
and Constitutional Services Lead Officer).

25/23 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kaur.

26/23 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

27/23 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2023 were
agreed as a correct record.

28/23 Additional Items of Business

There were no additional items of business to consider.

29/23 **Member Development Update**

The Committee received an update on the Member Development Programme (MDP).

The MDP continued to build on the new and revised programme that was implemented in 2022 and was frequently reviewed to ensure it continued to meet the identified and emerging needs of elected members and the wider organisation.

A skills audit had been created, which was key to measuring performance of members, in addition to supporting their learning needs for future roles. This would be implemented in the MDP for 2024/25, ensuring individual learning pathways are tailored to best support members. The PDP process was being reviewed and an update would be provided at a future meeting.

The Committee recommended that incumbent chairs should do a 5-minute video outlining what their committees/boards entailed so that this information could be shared with members when nominating to committees for the next municipal year.

30/23 **Committee on Standards in Public Life Annual Report: July 2022 – June 2023**

The Committee received the 2022-23 Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

The Committee noted the contents of the report for information, particularly that of relevance to Local Government.

31/23 **Review of Independent Persons dealing with Standards Matters**

The Committee received the latest position with regard to recruitment of Independent Persons for dealing with standards matters.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended there should be at least two Independent Persons for dealing with standards matters and that their views must be sought and taken into account by the Council before it made a decision on an allegation against an elected member that it had decided to investigate.

Full Council had previously given approval to the appointment of three Independent Persons for dealing with standards. There were currently two vacancies. A recent recruitment exercise resulted in one completed application form being received. The application was put on hold pending review and had since been withdrawn.

As the role was a voluntary position, no annual allowance was paid in respect of this appointment, other than payment of travelling and subsistence expenses at the appropriate rate. A benchmarking exercise had therefore been undertaken to review remuneration packages from similar local authorities.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to undertake a further round of recruitment for additional Independent Persons using a range of media, online, community and professional forums to ensure a diverse and representative pool of applicants is identified;
- (2) that the Committee notes allowance and remuneration arrangements in neighbouring and peer authorities and requests the Independent Remuneration Panel to review and comment on this matter and report back to a future meeting of the Committee.

32/23

Gifts and Hospitality Register

The Committee noted the two new entries that had been made to the Gifts and Hospitality Register.

33/23 **National Cases**

The Committee received details of a national case that was presented as part of its learning and development.

34/23 **Complaints Update**

Members received the latest update on complaints.

In response to questions, the Committee was informed that the number of complaints had been significantly reduced, with only six live cases under consideration.

35/23 **Work Programme**

The Committee considered the work programme for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year.

In response to questions relating to health and safety, the Committee was advised that a review would be undertaken. A training session on personal safety was scheduled.

It was agreed that a meeting of the working group would be held to discuss the review on personal safety and a report brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that a meeting of the Working Group be set up in relation to personal safety for elected members.

36/23 **Monitoring Officer**

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, placed on record the Committee's appreciation to the service that the Director of Law and Governance, Surjit Tour, had provided to Council and the Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.37pm.

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk