

Standards Committee

Monday 2 October 2023 at 6.00pm.

In a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Members Present

Councillor Martin (Chair)
Councillor Burley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Allen
Councillor Andrew
Councillor Bashir
Councillor Follows
Councillor Lee
Councillor Nazir
Councillor Sears

Independent Persons Present

Mr A. Green
Mr C. Magness

Officers Present

Mr A. Cox	-	Director of Governance
Mr M. Halliwell	-	Assurance Lead Officer (Strategy, Change and Performance)
Ms S. Lloyd	-	Democratic Services Officer

11. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms D. Mardner.

12. Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in private session.

15. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held 12 July 2021, 11 October 2021 and 17 July 2023, copies having being circulated in advance, be approved as correct records.

16. **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report**

The Assurance Lead Officer led the Committee through the annual review of 2022/23 provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) detailing the number and range of complaints referred by the LGSCO to the Council. He noted that there had been a slight change to the process used by the LGSCO that year and they were no longer investigating borderline cases so this meant that comparisons with previous years were more difficult. It was reported that 86% of complaints were upheld which was a slightly higher rate than previous years but that 100% of recommendations from the Ombudsman had been successfully implemented.

Following questions from the Committee the Assurance Lead Officer confirmed that the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee both received an annual report on complaints within those areas and the relevant Executive Director was involved in the process regarding complaints in their service area so they would be aware of any trends in the complaints received. Members of the Committee expressed their concerns at the governance and oversight in relation to complaints. The Director of Governance advised the Committee that should any relevant matters be discovered in the process of handling complaints a report would be brought to the Committee.

Resolved

That:

- 1. the report be noted; and**
- 2. the Monitoring Officer review the governance arrangements for complaints.**

17. **Member DBS Check Update**

The Committee received an update report on uptake of criminal record checks for elected members since its last discussion at Standards Committee on 17th July 2023. The Democratic Services Officer advised that 50 Members had a valid basic or enhanced criminal record check, 6 were awaiting the results of their check and the remaining 4 Members were working with Democratic Services to

provide the relevant ID to complete their checks. She also stated that Council, at its meeting on 18th September 2023, approved the recommendation of Standards Committee that all councillors involved in decisions on the provision of services for vulnerable adults undertake an enhanced DBS check and works had begun to contact the 9 Members affected who would now be requested to complete an enhanced check.

Resolved

That:

- 1. the report be noted; and**
- 2. the Committee continue to receive regular updates.**

18. Parental Leave for Councillors Progress

The Director of Governance advised the Committee that the agreed Parental Leave for Councillors policy had only recently been approved so very little data was available in relation to the efficacy of the policy as there had not been many councillors who needed to make use of the policy. He suggested that it would be beneficial to wait until further information was available and then take a further update at that stage.

Resolved

That:

- 1. The information be noted; and**
- 2. A report be brought back to the Committee when more data is available.**

19. Review of Learning from Thurrock Council Best Value Inspection Report

The Director of Governance reported on the recently published Thurrock Council Best Value Inspection report, highlighting the benefits to the Council of reviewing such reports and benchmarking its own governance against the recommendations to ensure all learning points are taken. He drew out in particular the importance of holding officers to account and the value of member training as key learning points from the report.

Members of the Committee thanked the Director of Governance for bringing this report to their attention and affirmed their belief that it was important all Members be sighted on such matters. They also commented that in recent years Member Development had been significantly improved but that it was of paramount importance that it continued to develop to suit the Council's needs.

Resolved

That:

1. The report be noted; and
2. The report be circulated to all Members.

20. **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 30 January 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6:50pm.

Chair

Date