

Standards Committee

Monday 22 February, 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

Digital Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulation 2020; and conducted according to the Council's Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.

Present

Councillor Rasab (Chair)
Councillor Underhill (Vice Chair)
Councillor Bashir
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor Burley
Councillor Samra
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor M. Statham
Councillor Young

Independent Person Present

Mr A. Green

Officers Present

Mr. Anthony Cox - Director of Governance
Mrs Bev Mycock - Democratic Services Officer

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and explaining the rule of procedure and legal content in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS) webpage.

Members and officers in attendance confirmed they could both see and hear the proceedings.

09/20 Apologies

There were no apologies received.

10/20 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

11/20 **Minutes**

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 26 October, 2020 as circulated and the Chair **moved** and they were duly **seconded**:

Resolved (7 in favour and 3 abstained by roll-call)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 October, 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:-

- Paragraph 06/20 on page 8 of the agenda pack, 3rd bullet point should have read 'advice' and not advise.

12/20 **Declarations of Interest**

The Independent Person, Mr. Green, declared an interest in agenda item 7 entitled 'Appointment of Independent Persons' and would therefore leave the meeting prior to consideration of the item.

The Chair advised Committee that he would take item 7 as the last item.

13/20 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items for consideration in private session.

14/20 **Local Government Association (LGA) Model Councillor Code of Conduct**

The Director of Governance presented the report and drew Members' attention to the finalised published version of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct at Appendix 1 of the report.

The Director of Governance advised that the Local Government Association (LGA) had taken the lead to re-establish a national code of conduct. Councils by law are obliged to have a code of conduct as a means by which Members could be held to account and how a local authority could show that they were upholding good standards across the council in terms of elected Member behaviour. The LGA had developed the Code in association with key partners and following extensive consultation with the sector, it had been refined and approved by the LGA in December, 2020. It was not mandatory for Councils to adopt the Code either in whole in or in part. However, if they did it would enable everyone to be clear as to what standards they were working to both locally, across the region and nationally. The LGA Code had been circulated to all elected Members for this consideration

The Director of Governance reported that he would like to establish a small, cross-party working group of between 3 and 5 elected Members to consider the LGA Code and to make recommendations to full Council in relation to adopting the Code partially or in its entirety. He stated that he would like to include the Independent Person within the working group as they provided an integral, independent role within Standards and would therefore need to be assured that any Code for approval by full Council would be appropriate for Walsall. An email invitation would be sent out to all elected Members, in consultation with Group Leaders as a matter of courtesy, advising Members to contact him directly to express their interest. If Committee were in agreement, he would then select a cross-party membership for the working group.

A discussion by the Committee ensued and clarification was sought that the working group would include some members of Standards Committee and that it was imperative that the Standards Committee review the report prior to its approval at full Council as included within the Committee's remit. The Director of Governance advised that he would like some members of the Standards Committee to be included within the working group and he requested that interested Committee Members contact him. He confirmed that the working group would bring a report back to the Standards Committee prior to consideration and onward approval by Council.

Resolved (unanimous by roll-call)

That:

- 1. A small working group of cross-party elected members be invited to work with the Monitoring Officer to consider whether or not the council should adopt the LGA model code of conduct in whole in or in part;**
- 2. The Independent Person be included as part of the working group;**
- 3. A final report of the working group be provided to Standards Committee prior to approval by the Council.**

15/20 Elected Member Learning and Development Programme

The Director of Governance updated the Committee on the progress of the Elected Member Development Programme, as requested at its previous meeting. The Elected Member Development Programme was a joint project between Legal and Democratic Services and HRD to enhance the offering to Elected Members in terms of learning and development and he highlighted the salient points therein.

The meeting discussed the importance of attending training and keeping skills up to date. Members expressed their concerns that a large number of elected Members had not completed the expected 12 hours of training each municipal year. The Director of Governance stated that the final training report was presented to Committee around the July and therefore training participation would

be greater by that time. He advised that all elected Members had been written to individually to update them on their current training record for this municipal year and requesting that they forward details of any additional training they may have attended which had been omitted from the document, including any accredited personal training. He drew Committee's attention to Elected Member Learning and Development Programme 2020/21 at Appendix 1 of the report, which included a mix of in-house and external training and he advised that elected Members would continue to be encouraged to attend a minimum of 12 hours training, as detailed within the Code, to assist them in their role.

A Member sought clarification as to why only elements of the Code of Conduct had been included within the mandatory Core Skills training and not a training session on the Code of Conduct as a whole. The Director of Governance advised that all Members were encouraged to attend training on any changes to the Code of Conduct, particularly if the Council made fundamental changes to elements of the Code. He reminded Committee that the Code of Conduct was published and also part of the Constitution and therefore there was an expectation that all elected Members would familiarise themselves with it. The Director of Governance advised that he would discuss and suggest to Group Leaders prior to any subsequent report to Council that training on the Code of Conduct be mandatory. In addition, he would update Group Leaders on where the Council was with its current training offering and training attendance figures.

Resolved (unanimous by assent)

That the report be noted

Mr. Green, having declared an interest in the next item, left the meeting.

16/20 Appointment of Independent Persons

The Director of Governance presented a report that set out the processes that had been undertaken to appoint an additional three Independent Persons on the Standards Committee and he clarified that a report had been submitted to Council to formally appoint the successful candidates. He stated that it was a positive report and that it was a credit to the Standards Committee on agreeing that an allowance be paid to Independent Persons to ensure that the Council attracted high quality candidates.

In response to a number of queries raised by Committee, the Director of Governance advised that Mr. Green would be the fourth Independent Person. He further advised that subject to appointment of the Independent Persons by the Council, one of the candidates would take part in Audit Committee and all four Independent Persons would work with Walsall Council only for the foreseeable future. He also stated that the Independent Persons had agreed to attend external, bespoke training and that supportive, internal training would be provided.

Resolved (unanimous by roll-call)

That Standards Committee:-

- 1. Support the appointment of the following individuals as Independent Persons on the Standards Committee for a period of 4 years;**
 - **Sureya Ajaz**
 - **Deborah Mardner**
 - **Carl Magness**
- 2. Note that a report has been submitted to Council to formally appoint those listed in (1) above and**
- 3. Note that the Independent Persons (Standards) shall be paid an allowance of £750.00 per annum.**

17/20 Date of next meeting.

The date of the next meeting to be confirmed at Annual Council.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.45pm

Chair

Date