

[These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 1 December 2016]

## **Standards Committee**

**1 September 2016**

Present: Councillor P Earley (In the Chair)  
Councillors J Allan, A Arkle, F Lott, P Mason and B Pickard.

Also Present: Mr G Clark (Independent Person)

### **SC07/09/16 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Johnson, K Osborne, L Spillard and Mrs S Gardner (Independent Person).

### **SC08/09/16 Appointment of Substitute Members**

There were no substitute members reported.

### **SC09/09/16 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations in relation to registerable personal interests reported.

### **SC10/09/16 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 June 2016 be confirmed.

### **SC11/09/16 Standards Committee – Action Plan/Work Programme**

A report was received from the Head of Law and Governance which advised the Standards Committee on the progress of the Committee's Action Plan/Work Programme for the year up to 31 March 2017.

The Standards Committee was responsible for the Authority's statutory duty for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by elected Members and co-opted Members of the Council.

The Action Plan/Work Programme was monitored by the Committee at each meeting and the progress of the identified actions would be reported in the Committee's Annual Report at the end of the municipal year.

Members were requested to consider the proposed tasks and matters that would be undertaken by the Committee as set out in the report.

It was reported that, as part of the ongoing programme of meetings with invited guests, an invitation had been accepted by the Deputy Chief Executive on his attendance at the next meeting of the Committee on 1 December 2016. Invitations had also been sent out to

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Chairs of Standards Committees from other Authorities in the region and attendance at future meetings and the responses were being coordinated.

A regional training event arranged by Newcastle City Council took place on 26 July 2016. The event was facilitated by Bevan Brittan LLP Solicitors who provided a detailed presentation and scenarios on the role and purpose of the Standards Committee; the role of the Chair, Independent Persons, Members and Officers including the Monitoring Officer in relation to ethical governance; Codes of Conduct for Members and officers; procedures for dealing with complaints, investigations and hearings including the possible sanctions and other legal remedies in relation. The event was well attended by the majority of the regional authorities including Members of the Standards Committee and Officers from the Authority.

A report providing details of attendance at training provided to Members would be submitted to the December meeting of the Committee.

A meeting of Chairs and Deputy Chairs and Independent Persons of Standards Committees in a regional forum had been arranged in liaison with other authorities for Mid-September.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

### **SC12/09/16 Members' Safety**

A report was received from the Head of Law and Governance which advised the Standards Committee on the guidance, training and support available to Members' in relation to their personal safety when undertaking ward business and surgeries.

On 16 June 2016, Jo Cox, the Member of Parliament for Batley and Spen, died after being shot and stabbed multiple times in Birstall, West Yorkshire shortly before she was due to hold a constituency surgery.

Following these events Parliament issued guidance to its Members' in relation to personal safety when undertaking constituency business. In addition, the Police issued, via the Authority, safety advice to all Councillors in the booklet attached at Appendix 1, entitled 'Protect Yourself'. The advice was also shared with Councillors across the country.

The Police indicated that they did not consider that there was any higher risk to Members of Parliament, local Councillors, or anyone in our communities following the murder of Jo Cox, but that they understood people might have raised concerns. The Police advised that concerns should be raised with local neighbourhood officers or by dialling 101.

Councillors were in a similar position to MPs when they undertook ward business and surgeries. The Authority had therefore reviewed the guidance that it issued to Members. A leaflet, drafted with the assistance of the Authority's Health and Safety service, would soon be issued to all Members' detailing appropriate guidance for Members' when they undertook ward business.

In addition, Lone Working and Conflict Management training had been made available to all Members'. This training was delivered on 27 July 2016.

Intelligence was often the key to understanding the extent of risk or even a potential attack. Members had therefore been requested to advise the Customer Liaison and Member Support Office of any incident, no matter how small or trivial, where their personal safety or the personal safety of a member of the public was at risk when ward business and surgeries were being undertaken. The collation of such intelligence would allow officers to establish patterns of behaviour and where necessary to advise Members accordingly, and, if necessary, the Police.

Linked to intelligence gathering Members were also being advised by the Customer Liaison and Member Support Office to check with their office that Risk Assessments of premises where they undertook surgeries and meet with the public had been completed. Information and guidance could be provided to Members' where a premise did not have a risk assessment. The purpose of the risk assessment was to allow a systematic examination of a site or premises where a surgery was undertaken to identify the significant or potential hazards that could cause harm or ill-health and allow measures to be identified to mitigate those hazards.

The Localism Act 2011 and the Authority's Code of Conduct required Member's to declare their Registerable Interests. The Act also required the Authority to publish on its website all Members' Registerable Interests. One of the requirements placed on Members' by the Code of Conduct was to declare property and land in which a Member had a beneficial interest in the Authority's area. This requirement would usually cover the Member's home address as well as any other property and land that the Member might have a legal interest in.

Some Members might have material concerns regarding the publication of their home address and the 2011 Act provides that where a Member was concerned that disclosure of the detail of an interest either at a meeting or on the Register of Members' Interests would lead to the Member or a person connected with him/her being subject to violence or intimidation, s/he may request the Monitoring Officer to agree that the interest was a "sensitive interest".

If the Monitoring Officer agreed, based on the evidence submitted by the Member, that there was a real prospect of the Member being subject to violence or intimidation, the Member was then allowed to disclose the existence of an interest only, rather than the detail of it at a meeting, and the Monitoring Officer could exclude the detail of the interest from the published version of the Register.

Members who considered that their circumstances were such that they had sensitive interests must contact the Monitoring Officer and provide evidence in support of the assertion. Whether a sensitive interest continued to exist was kept under periodic review.

It was noted that all Members of the Council had recently been issued with the 'Protect Yourself' Booklet. The Standards Committee welcomed the guide to personal security in that it was both useful and informative.

During consideration of the Members' Safety Report the following comments/suggestions were made:

With regard to intelligence gathering and Members being advised to check with their office on whether risk assessments of premises where they undertook surgeries and met the public. The Head of Law and Governance explained that a letter would be sent to all

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Members of the Council in relation to the risk assessments requirements, with a reminder of the request to advise the Customer Liaison and Member Support Office of any incident.

At the recent safety training the possibility of providing Members with personal alarms was raised with a suggestion that this could be followed up with the Authority's Health and Safety Service. Another suggestion was the potential to use telephones with a fast dial number to call for support.

The Committee was keen to explore whether training could be offered regarding how to avoid situations escalating e.g. conflict management, together with training regarding methods for dealing with emotional stress for example, dealing with constituents with particular issues which could have an impact on the councillor.

The Head of Law and Governance agreed to pass on the comments/suggestions received from the Standards Committee to the relevant officers.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.