

## **Standards Committee**

**31 August 2017**

Present: Councillor C Johnson (Chair)  
Councillors B Burdis, P Earley, Janet Hunter,  
F Lott, P Mason and B Pickard.

Also Present: Ms S Gardner, Independent Person.

### **SC08/08/17 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E N Darke and M Rankin.

### **SC09/08/17 Appointment of Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members reported.

### **SC10/08/17 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

### **SC11/08/17 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 June 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

### **SC12/08/17 Invited Guests**

The Chair of Planning Committee, Councillor Frank Lott, and, Chair of Regulation and Review Committee, Councillor Peter Earley, were invited to the meeting as part of the ongoing programme of engagement with invited guests in a dialogue with Members and appropriate Officers relating to the promotion of high ethical governance and ethical standards. Both Councillors were also members of the Standards Committee.

As members of the Standards Committee Councillor Earley and Councillor Lott were both aware of Members' responsibilities in the promotion of high standards, and although they were not aware of any ethical governance issues concerning their respective committee's however, they did offer to answer questions on the subject, if required.

Councillor Lott acknowledged the importance of communication for the Planning Committee in discharging its duties and made reference to a newsletter article 'Myth Busters', which was currently being produced by the Comms team and himself in order to better communicate with the general public on planning considerations, and to help address any misunderstandings in relation to planning matters.

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The Chair thanked Councillor Earley and Councillor Lott for their contribution to the discussion.

**Resolved** that the position be noted.

### **SC13/08/17 Member Development – monitoring and recording mandatory training**

A report was received from the Organisational Development Officer which advised the Committee of the implementation of the online functions to assist Elected Members to monitor and record mandatory training.

At a previous meeting of the Standards Committee it was agreed the Learning Pool (the Local Authority's online Learning Management System) be further improved to assist elected members to:-

- Identify mandatory training required for their role
- Be notified when training should be refreshed
- View training completions
- View other training and learning is available

The following improvements had been progressed:

New home page for all elected members on log-in to Learning Pool - a personalised home page within Learning Pool had been designed to navigate elected members to mandatory training and regulatory committee training. The personalised page also provided quick links to member workbooks produced by the Local Government Association and other training available to employees/elected members.

Certifications - were designed and built for all mandatory and regulatory committee training courses. Certifications ensured email reminders were sent to elected members when a new mandatory/regulatory committee training need had been identified or when training was due for renewal. Email reminders would be released by the end of August 2018 for all mandatory and regulatory committee training. The elected member certifications guidance was attached at Appendix A to the report.

Guidance and support - the Learning Pool had recently been updated with new functions, look and feel. In order to support elected Members to navigate the system and maximise new functions including certifications; a step by step guide had been produced. Demonstrations and one to one support was available upon request by the Human Resources and Organisation Development Service.

During discussion, the issue of non-completion of Members' mandatory training was raised. It was explained that a key function of the new Learning Pool was automated timed reminders and that once enrolled Members' would receive regular emails advising them when training should be completed or renewed. In the case of Members' who failed to complete mandatory training this could result in them being reported to their respective Group Leader, Committee Chair, or, if necessary, to the Standards Committee.

In response to a query about the e-learning options for appointees to the Regulation and Review Committee; it was explained that face-to-face training was currently available and that officers were looking at the possibility of introducing an e-learning facility in the future.

In response to a query about Members' access to the Learning Pool itself; it was explained that this could be achieved through any suitable device e.g. laptop, pc, mobile phone, etc., where internet access was available.

**Resolved** that the position be noted.

### **SC14/08/17 Action Plan and Work Programme 2017/18**

A report was received from the Head of Law and Governance which advised the Committee of the action plan/work programme of the Standards Committee for the year up to 31 March 2018.

The Standards Committee was responsible for the Authority's statutory duty to promote and maintaining high standards of conduct by the Elected Mayor, Councillors and Co-opted Members.

This Action Plan was monitored by the Committee at each meeting and the progress of the identified actions set out in the report would be included in the Committee's Annual Report to Council at the end of the municipal year.

The Head of Law and Governance in presenting the report highlighted some matters of note with regard to the progress of the identified actions, including:

A Pocket Guide to the Code of Conduct for Members' and the requirements in relation to interests had been developed and approved by the Standards for circulation to all Members' to assist in how the Code applied to them.

Advanced face-to-face training for those Members' who used social media regularly had been set-up and arrangements in place for the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017. Two sessions on each of the dates had been organised with 18 places per session available. The training to be hosted by North Tyneside Council had been opened up to authorities across the region. The Head of Law and Governance encouraged Members of the Standards Committee and political groups to sign-up to the sessions which would be interactive and practical.

A report on the Whistle-blowing Procedure for Members-Refresh was submitted for consideration elsewhere on the agenda.

The production of a generic list of chairing skills was discussed at the recent meeting of the Monitoring Officers' Group including ideas put forward to assist the smooth operation of Committees and decision making. A report on the outcome of the discussions would be submitted to a future meeting of the Standards Committee.

A report on Member Development - monitoring and recording of mandatory training was submitted for consideration elsewhere on the agenda.

Training for Chairs and Deputy Chairs and Independent Persons of Standards Committees in liaison with other authorities was discussed at the recent meeting of Monitoring Officers'. Options to deliver training were being coordinated by the Monitoring Officers' Group and further information would be provided in due course.

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At the regional development session for Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Independent Persons held on 3 April 2017, discussions enabled the identification of key themes or more specific issues or concerns which could be used to form the basis of an action list available for use by the Monitoring Officers' Group, with the potential for regional activities in response. A Standards Bulletin emerged as one of the themes for action to be looked at on a regional basis. Examples of bulletins/newsletters from authorities across the region had been circulated for consideration by the Monitoring Officers. The Monitoring Officers' Group was supportive of the creation of a Standards Bulletin and arrangements to deliver a bulletin were being examined.

**Resolved** that progress of the identified actions for the year up to 31 March 2018 be noted.

### **SC15/08/17 Whistle-blowing Procedure for Members-Refresh**

A report was received from the Head of Law and Governance on the Whistle-blowing Procedure for Members-Refresh.

The Standards Committee had within its Terms of Reference responsibility for the Whistle-blowing Procedure for Members'. The Authority's Whistle-blowing Procedure for Members was last updated in October 2012.

The refreshed Procedure which was appended to the report had been updated to reflect changes in the structure of the Authority, and the external agencies the Government had prescribed were appropriate to be advised of a whistle-blowing issue where the initial response of the Authority was not considered by a Member to be appropriate.

The link to the refreshed Whistle-blowing Procedure included in the report would be made available on the Members' Intranet.

**Resolved** that (1) the report be noted; and  
(2) the refreshed Whistle-blowing Procedure for Members appended to the report be approved.