

STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 14 SEPTEMBER 2023

Present: T Barnes (Chair);
Councillors Edwards (Vice-Chair), Asare, Ayub, Dennis, Gavin, Keane, Keeping and Moore

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10 October 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

5. PLANNING CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report outlining a new draft Planning Code of Conduct, as attached to the report as Appendix 1, for the Committee to consider.

Following updated advice published by the Local Government Association in 2019, *Probity in planning Advice for councillors and officers making planning decision*, a first draft was facilitated by an external firm of solicitors to support the revision of the current Planning Code of Conduct. In October 2022 the remit of the Standards Committee was expanded to include oversight of the Planning Code of Conduct. Therefore, the Committee considered the draft new Code, and the following suggestions were made:

- To include the option for Members to request site visits.
- Outline the role of the developer or agent at site visits.
- Consider the use of 'should' or 'must' in the document and where these terms should be used in relation to obligation rather than advisory.
- Current training should reflect the new Code.

The Committee noted that the new document was accessible and reflected current good practice.

An updated final version would be circulated to the Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) That the draft Planning Code attached as Appendix 1 be noted;
- (2) That the draft Planning Code be amended as per suggestions outlined in the minute above and the final draft be considered by the Committee at a future meeting.

6. HANDLING ARRANGEMENTS FOR COUNCIL DEVELOPMENTS

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The Monitoring Officer submitted a report providing the formal Handling Arrangements for Council Developments Policy.

As the Council could act as the local planning authority in respect of planning applications for development of its own land, and grant planning permission to itself; formal Handling Arrangements ensured separation of functions and acted as an 'information barrier' between teams of officers acting for the Council as applicant and as local planning authority. It was noted that the formal Handling Arrangements must be published on the Council's website and processes set out to officers on how documents storage systems would be restricted to maintain an information barrier between teams.

The Committee noted that paragraph 9.1.2 Article 9 of the Council's Constitution would also be expanded to include the Council's Handling Arrangements Policy to the list of policies within the remit of the Committee.

The Committee also considered as an example the arrangements that had been put in place for the Minister Quarter Development.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Handling Arrangements for Council Developments Policy be agreed;**
- (2) The arrangements put in place for the Minister quarter Development be noted;**

Recommended to Council -

- (3) That the Scope of the Standards Committee's powers be increased to explicitly include Handling Arrangements for Council Developments Policy;**
- (4) That the decision of the Standards Committee as regarding adoption of the Handling Arrangements for Council Developments Policy be endorsed.**

7. INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS 2022/23

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report outlining the number, type and disposal of complaints made by members of the public against councillors. The report covered complaints for 2022/23.

Annex A to the report contained a list of five complaints in the financial year 2022/23. It was noted that two of the complainants referred two councillors to the Monitoring Officer bringing the total number of complaints to seven.

Of the seven complaints set out in Annex A:

- 2 complaints resulted in no action as no evidence was provided when requested.
- 4 were judged not to engage the Code of Conduct and were rejected at the initial filter stage.
- 1 complaint was against a third-party contractor and not due to councillor conduct.

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Annex A also provided data on the timeliness of responses to acknowledge and answer complaints.

It was noted that if a complaint was brought regarding a third-party contractor employed by the Council, then this would need to go through the Council's official complaints process.

The Committee were informed that guidance on the use of Council resources for political purposes was included in the Councillors Code of Conduct and Handbook. Training on the new Code of Conduct had been provided to all new councillors following the election and further training would be arranged for all existing councillors.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Member Complaints received in the financial year 2022/2023 be noted.**
- (2) That training would be provided to all councillors on the Code of Conduct.**
- (3) That any further work which might be necessary to promote high standards of conduct in public life in the Council be considered.**

[The Committee noted that Tina Barnes would be stepping down from Standards Committee meeting and this would be her last meeting. The Committee thanked Tina for all her work and support over the years as Chair.]

(The meeting closed at 6.30 pm)