

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of this Committee held on
18 January 2022

(Present) Councillors Bond, Bowden, Maguire, Maloney MBE, Murphy, Quinn, Smith, Sweeney and van der Burg.

(Not Present) Councillor Pearson

6 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Pearson.

7 MINUTES

* **Resolved that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2021 be approved and signed.**

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

No Declarations of Interest from Members were made.

9 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2021

A report was presented with the Annual Review letter which the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman sent to the Chief Executive on 28 July 2021 and is reported to the next ordinary meeting of the Standards Committee.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) provided an Annual Review Letter to each Council to help inform elected members of their respective Council's performance in relation to complaints. A copy of the letter was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The Annual Review Letter provided information in relation to the number of complaints received by the LGSCO in the twelve-month period ending 31 March 2021, as well as the decisions reached by the LGSCO in the same period. Members noted that in this period, four complaints were upheld, which, in comparison to 2019/20, was two less. This was based on a total of five detailed investigations for this period. 80% of complaints investigated were upheld, which compares to an average of 72% in similar authorities.

The Ombudsman reported that in 100% of cases they were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented their recommendations. For the four upheld complaints in 2020/21, there were no trends or patterns across particular service areas to report.

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

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10 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS 2021/22

A report was submitted which informed the Committee of Ombudsman cases from 1 April 2021 to 31 December 2021.

The report summarised the number of complaints against the Council determined by the Ombudsman which were explained by the Monitoring Officer.

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

11 MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

A report was submitted which detailed the training opportunities available to members and attendance rates during January 2020 and January 2022. The complete summary results were shown in Appendix 1.

In accordance with the records held by the Organisational Design and Development Team, 44 training sessions were delivered during the period of January 2020 to 6 January 2022 on a variety of subject matters. The sessions were attended by a total of 412 members equating to an average of 9.4 members per session.

Due to the focus on Covid response priorities the internal member training offer was significantly reduced during 2020. However, members continued to have access to online training provided by the Council, LGA and other external agencies, in addition to support and guidance from Officers as and when required.

In May 2021, the Council introduced the new online induction programme for newly elected members, providing access to digital learning resources at a time and place that suited individuals' needs. The evaluation of the programme and further development recommendations will be reported to the next Member Training and Development Steering Group meeting in February 2022.

In September 2021, the Council shared the updated training and development offer with all members. The offer was based on a blended learning approach including reading resources, e-learning, briefings, external training, and digital learning opportunities. This offer would be reviewed and updated for forthcoming municipal years.

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

12 AMENDMENTS TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ELECTED AND CO-OPTED MEMBERS

A report was submitted which outlined the changes to the Local Government Association ("LGA") Model Code of Conduct for Members and recommended corresponding amendments to the Council's adopted Code of Conduct for Elected & Co-Opted Members.

The LGA undertook a review of the Member model code of conduct in response to the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life ("CSPL").

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The CSPL found there was considerable variation in the length, quality and clarity of codes of conduct across local authorities. The LGA was tasked to develop a code that benchmarked a standard for all in public office and for those engaged in public discourse and debate. It aimed to set out the duties and expectations of persons in public office. The expectation was that all Councils should adopt it as minimum but provision for additional local variations was permitted.

A shared version of the model Code was proposed for consideration by each of the Liverpool City Region local authorities and joint authorities to adopt for consistency when members were appointed to those bodies.

A modified version of the LGA Model Code ("Merseyside Model Code") was considered by Standards Committee at its meeting held on 2 June 2021 and adopted by the Council at its meeting held on 21 July 2021.

The LGA subsequently issued amendments to the model Code, which were highlighted in red text in Appendix 1 to the report. The majority of the changes made to the LGA Model Code had been made to correct typographical errors. However, a significant change had been made to the prejudicial interest test, which in the Merseyside Model Code and original LGA Model Code was applied to 'your interests'. The revised drafting properly expands the scope of the test to include other interests and those of family and associates.

- * **Resolved that Council be recommended to endorse updating the Council's adopted Code of Conduct for Elected & Co-Opted Members in accordance with the revised LGA Model Code of Conduct for Members.**

13 **UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS AGAINST ELECTED MEMBERS**

A verbal report was made by the Monitoring Officer which updated the Committee on complaints received alleging breaches of the Code of Conduct. Council had delegated powers to the Monitoring Officer to consider complaints and determine if they should be the subject of a full investigation in accordance with the agreed Procedure for Dealing with Complaints regarding breach of the Code.

Since January 2021, the Monitoring Officer had received 32 complaints against Members including Parish Councillors, which had been dealt with under delegated powers. 16 of the complaints were submitted by Councillors against Councillors and 16 from members of the public. Out of 32 cases, 27 were concluded at stage 1 of the Procedure which the Monitoring Officer decided not to investigate in accordance with the examples listed in Appendix 1 of the Procedure. 5 cases concluded at stage 2 of the Procedure by way of alternative resolution i.e. informal advice. There were 5 complaints outstanding.

- * **Resolved that the verbal update be noted.**