

Ethics Committee

Meeting of held on Wednesday, 12 February 2020 at 6.30 pm in F10, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Clive Fraser (Chair);
Councillor Pat Clouder (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Simon Brew, Patricia Hay-Justice, Joy Prince and Helen Redfern
Independent Member Anne Smith

Also Present: Jacqueline Harris Baker (Executive Director of Resources and Monitoring
Officer), Sandra Herbert (Head of Litigation & Corporate Law) and Howard
Passman

Apologies: Independent Member Ashok Kumar

PART A

11/20 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

12/20 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interests.

13/20 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

14/20 Annual update on the use of RIPA

The item was introduced by the Information and Governance Co-ordinator. It was highlighted that since the publication of the report, the National Anti-Fraud Network, the Council's 'Single Point of Contact' for the processing of communication requests, had successfully passed its inspection by the Home Office.

15/20 Annual update on Member learning and development

The item was introduced by the Senior Democratic & Governance Officer – Council & Regulatory who highlighted the following key points:

- i. Members had been surveyed on their training needs for the first time during the 2019-20 municipal year;
- ii. A new survey of Member training needs was due to be launched following the meeting. This would include questions on the timing of training reflecting that it had been difficult to schedule training during the current municipal year, particularly as a result of the General Election;
- iii. The Panel had discussed the low take up of training opportunities and aimed to address this during the next municipal year; and
- iv. There were a number of sessions planned which would need to be scheduled and there would also be training arising from the Governance Review to be accommodated.

In response to Member questions, it was established that only a third of the available training budget of £21K for Member training had been spent during the 2019/20 municipal year. Members noted their disappointment and considered what more could be done to encourage Councillors to review their needs and attend the necessary training. It was agreed that the Committee would recommend that the Member Learning and Development Panel should explore the availability of a competency framework for Councillors against which needs could be assessed. It was thought that something suitable might be provided by the *Local Government Association*.

It was noted that apart from Members of the Licensing and Planning Committees who were statutorily required to be trained before sitting, there was no ability to require Councillors to attend training. It was stressed that getting better take-up of training needed to be addressed by the Groups with the Committee calling for all Members to respond positively to the opportunities provided.

A Committee Member described how he was keen to attend training on local authority digital transformation but had been unsuccessful as courses failed to run due to lack of interest. In response, it was suggested that the Council could call on its in-house expertise to deliver training where this could not be fulfilled externally. A dialogue on this through the Member Learning and Development Panel was encouraged.

Finally, the Committee called on all Members to complete the training survey that was to be circulated.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED to note the report and made the following recommendations:

- i. The Member Learning and Development Panel should investigate the availability of a competency framework for Councillors against which training needs could be assessed;
- ii. All Members should respond positively to the training opportunities available; and
- i. All Members should complete the training survey that was to be circulated.

16/20 Annual Whistleblowing Report

The item was introduced by Executive Director for Resources and Monitoring Officer. It was described how the whistleblowing policy had been reviewed and refreshed by the Committee. This was signposted for staff on the Council's Intranet along with details of how to contact *Protect*, the frontline organisation with responsibility for providing independent advice to those who wished to raise a concern.

It was reported that only one disclosure had been made during the 2019 calendar year. This was typical with the number of disclosures usually low. The disclosure had been formally investigated under the policy. The resulting recommendations had been taken-up and the disclosure dealt with to the satisfaction of the Council and the individual. It was described how the disclosure concerned a potential conflict between personal and professional duties with the recommendation made that the conflict be declared. It transpired that the employee involved had resigned. It was clarified that this was not the employee who had made the disclosure.

The Members of the Committee noted that the Council had a whistleblowing policy in place that was being used effectively.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED to note the report.

17/20 Annual update on Member complaints

The item was introduced by Executive Director for Resources and Monitoring Officer. It was reported that eight complaints about Members had been received during 2019. Of these, the Monitoring Officer requested further information on four with six being judged to have sufficient information. Of these, three related to complaints arising out of the Planning Committee, one related to Full Council and two dealt with Member conduct outside of Council meetings. All had been judged against the Assessment Criteria with none progressing further.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED to note the report.

18/20 Dispensation Applications for Members

There were no applications received for Member dispensations and therefore this item was not required.

19/20 Work Programme

The Chair noted that there was one further Ethics Committee meeting scheduled for the municipal year. This would take place in April 2020 and would take an item on the appointment of additional Independent Persons. This was for the Committee to receive the recommendations of the Selection Panel that the Committee had resolved be established at its meeting in

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January 2020. The Executive Director for Resources and Monitoring Officer noted that the advert placed seeking Independent Persons had already received two responses.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED to note the report.

20/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This item was not required.

21/20 Dispensation Applications for Members

There were no applications received for Member dispensations and therefore this item was not required.

The meeting ended at 6.46 pm

Signed:

Date: