

Ethics Committee

Meeting of held on Wednesday, 15 November 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber,
Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel (Chair);
Councillor Brigitte Graham (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Helen Redfern, Esther Sutton and Luke Shortland

Also present: Independent Members
Ashok Kumar, Alan Malarkey and Jennifer Gordon (virtual)

Apologies: Councillor Jade Appleton

PART A

43/22 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

44/22 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

45/22 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

46/22 Work Programme

The Interim Head of Democratic Services, Adrian May, discussed updates on the work programme. It was advised that whilst there was a recommendation to appoint an Independent Person on the previous agenda, another vacancy for the position of an Independent Person had arisen, appointment would be added to the next meeting.

The Committee agreed to add a good practice review, with particular focus on the role and training needs for the Independent Persons, to the Work Programme.

RESOLVED to note, consider, and comment on changes to the work programme as detailed in the report.

47/22 Member Gifts and Hospitality

The Interim Head of Democratic Services, Adrian May, discussed the Gifts and Hospitality report covering the last reporting period. It was mentioned that Members who declared gifts and hospitality of the 'unknown' value would be asked to provide estimates and the online register would be updated accordingly.

It was acknowledged that Councillor King's name was mistakenly mentioned in the report, and it would be removed, with apologies to the Committee.

RESOLVED to note any Gifts and Hospitality declarations made by Members since 5 July 2023.

48/22 Recent Developments in Ethical Standards Report

The Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense, introduced the report and discussed the recent decision of the Crown Prosecution Service not to proceed with the prosecution of a former elected mayor of Middlesbrough for alleged failures to declare pecuniary interests and details of a Hearings Sub-Committee decision under the Ethics Complaints Process in West Northamptonshire relating to a Councillors pre-determination and related conduct at a planning Committee.

The responsible officers explained the disclosure of interest is an individual responsibility of Members. However, Members are periodically reminded about the need to disclose in the Member's Bulletin. There would be additional reminders sent before the Budget-setting Council meeting.

It was agreed that the West Northamptonshire case would be shared with the Planning Committee Members.

RESOLVED to note the Recent Development in Ethical Standards Report.

49/22 Review of Ethics Arrangements

The Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense, introduced the report arising from recommendations made in the Grant Thornton Interim Auditor's Annual Report on the London Borough of Croydon (2019-22, 2020-21 and 2021-22).

The Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer assured the Committee that the Council's arrangements were effective and in accordance with the statutory requirements. There were 'tidying up' amendments required to the Code and the arrangements which would be the subject of a further report to the Council.

RESOLVED to note the Review of Ethics Arrangement Report.

50/22 Update on Ethics Complaints Received in the Second and Third Quarters of 2023

The Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense, introduced the report arising from recommendations made in the Update on Ethics Complaints Received in the Second and Third Quarters of 2023 report.

In response to the Chair's question, the officer explained the complaints process. Also, it was explained that under the current arrangement, there was no obligation to notify the Chief Whips.

RESOLVED to note the Quarterly Complaint report.

51/22 Independent Person Appointment

The Interim Head of Democratic Services, Adrian May, introduced the Independent Person Appointment Report.

It was acknowledged that this Report was initially supposed to be discussed in Part B. However, later it was agreed that the report could be made publicly available in discussed in Part A.

RESOLVED, to:

1. Agree to recommend the appointment of Luisa Zingone as an Independent Person to be agreed on the next Council meeting;
2. Thank Don Axcell for his valuable service as Independent Person and to note his resignation as Independent Person.

52/22 Exclusion of the Press and Public

It was not necessary to exclude the press and public from any portion of this meeting.

RESOLVED, to move Appendix A – Part B recommendations to the Ethics Committee to the public section of the meeting.

53/22 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Part B minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

54/22 Appendix B - Complaints Quarterly Report

RESOLVED to note the Quarterly Complaint report.

55/22 Appendix A - Part B recommendations to the Ethics Committee

RESOLVED, to:

1. Agree to recommend the appointment of Luisa Zingone as an Independent Person to be agreed on the next Council meeting;
2. Thank Don Axcell for his valuable service as Independent Person and to note his resignation as Independent Person.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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