

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 April 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr V Ricketts – Chair

Cllr A Chapmanlaw – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr S Armstrong, Cllr E Connolly, Cllr B Nanovo, Cllr K Rampton (In place of Cllr P Broadhead) and Cllr O Walters

Present Mr P Cashmore, Mr I Sibley (Independent Persons)
Virtually:

22. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr P Broadhead.

23. Substitute Members

Notification was received that Cllr K Rampton was substituting for Cllr P Broadhead for this meeting.

24. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

25. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record for the Chair to sign.

26. Public Issues

There were no public questions, statements or petitions submitted for this meeting.

27. Dispensations granted January 2024 to March 2024

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Committee was advised of the dispensations granted to councillors by the Monitoring Officer during the period 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024. Details of the dispensations and the related business and meetings these had applied to were set out in paragraphs 1 to 6 of the report.

The Monitoring Officer was asked why there has been a need to request dispensations for the debates on Safety Valve and EHCPs. She explained that this was due to the nature of individual interests and the difficulty in containing the debate on a strategic level. The Committee was advised of the factors considered by the Monitoring Officer when deciding whether or not to grant a dispensation, including the number of councillors affected and the potential impact on the debate. The aim of the report was to promote transparency by informing the Committee of such decisions.

RESOLVED that the dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer during the period 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024 be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

28. Code of Conduct Complaints - Review

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided an update on complaints regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct against councillors received or concluded since last brought to the Committee in January 2024. Details of allegations/complaints were outlined in the table set out in paragraph 8 of the report. Cases which were shown as closed in the previous report had been removed.

Committee Members and Independent Persons supported a suggestion received since the publication of the report, to include the associated dates relating to each complaint so that it was easier to identify which were legacy complaints and which fell within current timescales. The Chair explained that it was also proposed to include a summary of complaints received and dismissed to provide a better oversight of the amount of work dealt with. The Monitoring Officer indicated that this information could be set out in a separate table to also include the number of queries received.

In response to a question the Monitoring Officer explained the procedures followed in assessing and progressing complaints as set out in the appendix to the Code of Conduct in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution. The Monitoring Officer agreed to clarify with members after the meeting the rationale for closing complaint reference TPC011.

The Chair placed on record thanks to both Independent Persons, Mr Paul Cashmore and Mr Ian Sibley, for their work in the consideration of complaints.

RESOLVED that the outcome of concluded complaints and the progress of those still outstanding be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

29. Member Training requirements for 2024/2025

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Committee was reminded of its role in promoting good ethical governance and maintaining an oversight of Member training requirements. Following the local elections in May 2023, all Councillors received an induction training programme, a copy of which was circulated at Appendix 1, to ensure they were equipped to fulfil their democratically elected roles.

The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider and advise on training requirements for the forthcoming municipal year 2024/2025. The Monitoring Officer explained in more detail some suggested areas for ongoing training as set out in paragraph 4 of the report, including planning and licensing, code of conduct, social media and access to information. Among the points raised she highlighted the number of complaints received in recent months relating to the use of social media and the number of queries received around access to information and the use of exemption paragraphs.

The Committee discussed and suggested a number of topics to take forward for future Member training, including:

- Code of Conduct – For newly elected members, training should be timely to enable members to comply with any statutory requirements (e.g. registration of interests). Within this training it may be helpful to include basic training on the Constitution, particularly Part 4 - Procedure Rules, to aid understanding and reduce complaints.
- Social Media – Members acknowledged the number of recent incidents and potential pitfalls to be avoided. Suggestions included the use of case studies in training and the publication of the [LGA's social media guidance](#) on the Council's website to raise public awareness. The offer of an Independent Person to observe the Member training was welcomed.
- Access to Information – To include better awareness and understanding of reasons why information may be classed as exempt, for the benefit of Members and members of the public. To make this information more easily accessible by including it on the democracy pages on the Council's website and possibly a short video summary.
- Planning and Licensing – as quasi-judicial functions it was noted that training was mandatory for new members and substitutes before sitting on these committees.

Committee Members and Independent Persons also made a number of comments and suggestions on mechanisms for delivering and monitoring training, including:

- Members elected in by-elections – the need for comprehensive induction training to be provided for Members elected during the term was highlighted.
- The Induction Programme was very detailed, particularly for new members. It was suggested that it may be better delivered through regular/repeat sessions as Members gained experience and new questions arose, perhaps on an annual basis to be tailored for the forthcoming year.
- More signposting to external training opportunities
- Use of peer mentoring and sharing best practice. It was noted that external training provision had cost implications and that there were smart ways of working with other councils to share knowledge and expertise.
- Monitoring of training. It was noted that induction training videos and material were uploaded on the Councillors Zone training portal on Sharepoint for Members to view as required. This was currently undertaken on trust but if desired a more official mechanism for recorded completed training could be explored. It was also suggested that the Committee could include on its work programme a review of the register of training for Members every six months.

In order to maintain the momentum of the debate the Monitoring Officer suggested an amendment to the recommendation in the report to enable her and the Head of Democratic Services to work with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee to draft a proposed training programme for future consideration.

RESOLVED that having advised on the provision of Member Training for 2024/25 and more generally, the Committee delegates responsibility to the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Democratic Services to work with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee to draft a proposed Member Training programme for future consideration.

Voting: Unanimous

The meeting ended at 6.57 pm

CHAIR