

Resources Department
7 Newington Barrow Way
London N7 7EP

Report of: The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Meeting of: Audit Committee

Date: 15 November 2022

Ward(s): All

Subject: Annual Report on Member Standards and Conduct

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. The councillor's role is a vital part of our democracy, helping to ensure that the Council remains focussed on its residents and communities and makes the best possible decisions on their behalf. It is vitally important that councillors meet public expectations of conduct, are effectively supported in their role and equipped to undertake it successfully.
- 1.2. To ensure that the trust residents have in the council continues, councillors must demonstrate high standards of conduct, make well informed and appropriate decisions, engage positively in development opportunities and be held accountable if their conduct fails to reach the high standards required.
- 1.3. In accordance with the Audit Committee Terms of Reference, the Monitoring Officer is required to submit to the committee an annual report concerning standards of member conduct, including a summary of complaints received under the Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure and their outcome. The complaints received in the municipal year 2021-22 are detailed below. This report also includes information on member training and development and declarations of interest.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. To note the contents of this report.

3. Background

Member training and development

- 3.1. There were by-elections in four wards in May 2021 and a further by-election in Tollington Ward in June 2021 and a full member induction and development programme, which was open to all councillors, was undertaken. The training included sessions on civil emergencies, data protection, managing casework and presentations on the work of each department. Training on Securing Social Value was also held later in the year.
- 3.2. A Member Development Manager was appointed in September 2021 and started in post in December. The Member Development Manager initially focused on arrangements for extensive member induction to follow the local election in May 2022 and has established a Member Learning and Development Steering Group.
- 3.3. There is a small budget available for external training and conference attendance, which is divided between the Executive and backbench members to ensure it is fairly allocated. Training and development events attended in 2021-22, included Leadership Essentials training, Leadership of Place training, Media training, Advanced Charing Skills training, an event on improving domestic energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty and LGA Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Councillors Development events and one member is participating in the Future Vision Programme.
- 3.4. Information about free of charge and subsidised development opportunities, provided by London Councils and the Local Government Association, was regularly circulated to Members and the political group office.
- 3.5. Members were also provided with specific advice on governance issues from time to time, including advice regarding declarations of interest and information governance.

Financial Declarations

- 3.6. Members reviewed, confirmed and where necessary, updated, their register of interests, including their financial declarations, in March 2022. The Members Register of Interests is available on the Council's democracy website.
- 3.7. The Members interests, declarations of interest made at meetings, declarations regarding gifts and hospitality and the councillors' attendance record at committee meetings are all available on the Council's democracy website.

Complaints

3.8. All complaints under the Members Code of Conduct are referred to the Monitoring Officer (the Director of Law and Governance). Following consideration of the complaint, the Monitoring Officer decides whether it is appropriate to seek an informal resolution. Where there is no informal resolution, the Monitoring Officer may:

- decide not to investigate further,
- decide that the matter requires investigation.
- decide to refer the decision as to whether or not there is to be an investigation to the Standards Committee.

3.9 No formal complaints, which required the Standards Committee to be convened were received against Members during 2021-22, although some issues have been raised which have not reached that stage, as follows:

	Complainant	Topic	Formal complaint	Outcome
1	Member of the public	That a councillor had blocked him on their personal Twitter account.	N	The complainant did not proceed with a formal complaint.
2	Member of the public	That a councillor encouraged them to breach the General Data Protection Regulations	N	The complainant did not proceed with a formal complaint.
3	Councillor	That a councillor made a defamatory statement about another councillor during a Council meeting.	Y	An initial investigation was undertaken which recommended that the Monitoring Officer exercise discretion and the complaint was not referred to the Standards Committee because it could reasonably be construed that the councillor legitimately exercised their freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR and that, within the context of political debate in the Council Chamber, the councillor's comments

				attracted the enhanced protection afforded to political speech and debate.
4	Member of the public	That a councillor failed to act on information supplied regarding systematic abuse of children and staff by Islington social care managers and others.	Y	The complainant did not respond to requests for information necessary to undertake an initial assessment of their complaint.
5	Member of the public	That a councillor mocked a petition submitted to a Council meeting and belittled the member of the public presenting it.	N	The complainant did not proceed with a formal complaint.
6	Member of the public	That a councillor mocked a petition submitted to a Council meeting and was inconsiderate, inappropriate and condescending.	N	The complainant did not proceed with a formal complaint.
7	Member of staff	That a councillor failed to provide information requested.	Y	The complaint did not fall within the provisions of the Member Code of Conduct.
8	Three Members of the public	That a councillor canvassed inappropriately.	Y	The complaint did not fall within the provisions of the Member Code of Conduct.
9	Two Members of the public	That a councillor canvassed inappropriately.	Y	The complaint did not fall within the provisions of the Member Code of Conduct.

4. Implications

4.1. Financial Implications

- 4.1.1. The Council spent £15,156 on training courses and development opportunities for councillors in the 2021/22 financial year. The costs relating to Member Induction following the election on 5 May 2022 fall into the 2022/23 financial year and will be included in the next annual report. The Council has increased the budget for member training and development for future years as part of its commitment to support councillors in undertaking their vital role.

4.2. Legal Implications

- 4.2.1. The Council has a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members (section 27(1) Localism Act 2011). The Council has adopted a Code dealing with the conduct that is expected of Members and Co-opted Members when they are acting in that capacity (as required by section 27(2) Localism Act 2011). The Code has been revised to incorporate the LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020.

4.3. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

- 4.3.1. There are no environmental implications arising directly from this report.

4.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 4.4.1. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 4.4.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required, because there are no equalities implications arising directly from this report.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1. Audit Committee is asked to note the content of this report to maintain an overview of member conduct.

Appendices: None.

Background papers: None.

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Feltham', written in a cursive style.

Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Date: 28 October 2022

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