

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
Standards Committee
Minutes



Tuesday 7 May 2024

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Rebecca Harvey, Helen Rowbottom, Rowan Ree, Rory Vaughan and Alex Karmel

Independent members:

Other Councillors:

Officers:

1. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

Dr Tom Babbedge was elected as the Chair of the Standards Committee.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from His Honour John Rylance and Dilina Ostborn.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2022 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record of the proceedings.

5. ADOPTION OF A NEW MEMBER'S CODE OF CONDUCT

The Meeting was asked to consider and approve the LGA draft model Code of conduct, supported by the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, for adoption by Full Council. The draft Code had addressed the issues of sanctions lacking in the previous version considered, and the LGA's recommended guidance on the Member Code of Conduct Complaints handling guidance sets out a clear process for handling complaints when received.

Members noted that the previous Code had no weight to impose sanctions. This draft goes a long way to address that deficiency. However, the complaints guidance has more details than the previous version due to the additional section on sanctions.

The following issues were raised, and some amendments were requested to the Code: -

Section 1 (Code) - Training should be provided to Chairs of meetings on how to handle abusive, disruptive, intimidatory or threatening members of the public at meetings.

Section 2 (Code) – It was noted that it is a Member’s responsibility to monitor what is published in their social media handles. It would be logically impossible for officers to monitor all Members’ accounts and some members might not agree to inform the Council of their social media handles to protect their privacy.

Section 11.1 (Code) - As the nature of references taken were post interview and there may be instances where an applicant could have worked with a Councilor in a professional capacity. It was agreed that if an exceptional case like this occurs, the Councillor should consult the Monitoring Officer before providing a reference.

Section 12.2 (Code) - Officers to clarify that disqualification as inserted by the Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022 section 1 relates to “Disqualification relating to sexual offences” which is in addition to other reasons why a Member can be disqualified from holding office.

Language (Code) – There should be a consistent use of you or I throughout the document.

Legal Representations (Guidance) – Members noted that there were some inconsistencies in the guidance regarding whether a Member could have legal representation at a Panel or not. It was agreed that the guidance should be amended to allow Members to bring legal representation to a hearing.

Interpretation of the Guidance – The meeting welcomed the guidance and agreed that the Monitoring Officer should have the discretion to interpret it. If the LGA produced a further update this should be referred to the Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED THAT

1. That the Member Code of Conduct attached as appendix 1 be recommended to Full Council for adoption with the comments made tonight be incorporated into the Code.
2. That the list of sanctions at Appendix 2 available to the Committee if a Councillor breaches the Code, be approved.
3. That the LGA’s Guidance on the Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling (the “Guidance on complaints handling”) at Appendix 3 be adopted.

4. That the Arrangements for dealing with complaints alleging a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct at Appendix 4, be approved.
5. To delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer, following consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee, to make any final minor changes to the recommended Member Code of Conduct prior to submission to Full Council.

Meeting started: 6.14 pm
Meeting ended: 7.04 pm

Chair

Contact officer

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