



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Held: TUESDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dr Barton (Chair)

Councillor Cank

Councillor Whittle

Councillor Joannou

Also present:

Ms Fiona Barber

Independent Member

Mr Mike Galvin

Independent Member

Ms Jayne Kelly

Independent Member

Ms Alison Lockley

Independent Member

Mr Simon Smith

Independent Member

Mr Mick Edwards

Independent Person

Mr David Lindley

Independent Person

Mr Kamal Adatia

Monitoring Officer

Ms Jessica Skidmore

Governance Services

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Moore, who had been substituted by Councillor Whittle.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interest they may have in the business to be discussed on the agenda.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Members were asked to confirm that the Minutes of the previous meeting held

on 5th December 2023 were a true and accurate record.

Independent Person, David Lindley, noted that he was present for the meeting and requested that the minutes of the meeting be amended to reflect that.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th December 2023 be confirmed as a true and accurate record, subject to the above amendment.

4. REVISED ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH STANDARDS COMPLAINTS AT LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL UNDER THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report detailing the revised procedural 'arrangements' for review by the Committee.

The Monitoring Office presented the report, thanking Members for their commitment to the Standards Committee. Attention was drawn to prior discussions surrounding the frequency of meetings at the last meeting, in which biannual meetings were found to be appropriate, with sub-committee's convening as and when appropriate.

It was noted that the mid 2024 meeting scheduled did not take place largely due to the impact of the Council's cyber incident.

The Monitoring Officer drew attention to Appendix B, which detailed lessons learned from received complaints, reflections in collaboration with Independent Person's of the Committee and the resulting suggested changes, which note the following:

- Page 7 – Wording of item 4F had been amended. It was noted that there may be instances in which the code was engaged but not breached and may be disproportionate to take the case further.
- Page 8 – An addition was made to include the possibility of a separate breach of the code of conduct, should the subject Member not comply with the recommended informal recommendation. Further mention was made to incidents involving a public forum, such as social media, and how that resolution should be conducted. This allowed for a degree of discretion for the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person to ensure the best outcome.

Members noted that they were happy with the sensible changes made to the arrangements.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

5. RESPONDING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE STANDARDS REGIME

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report regarding the consultation launched on 18th December 2024 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, seeking views on proposals to introduce measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime for local authorities in England.

The Monitoring Officer presented the report, noting the importance for Members to review the proposed changes and provide any questions or comments to be submitted prior to the consultation deadline the next day. It was noted to be the biggest potential change to ethical standards in Government since 2012. The proposed had been worked on in collaboration with the Committee on Standard's in Public Life (CSPL) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

It was noted that the code had changed in 2022, however the City Council did not take on the recommendations and adopt the code, as the Council's own code had been considered more readable and best suited the Council's needs but would refer to national code guidance if additional detail in complaints was required.

The Monitoring Officer provided some background on the past situation regarding the Standards Regime, noting that officials believed the structure was too cumbersome, with a larger overarching Standard's Board for England involved. It was believed that a swifter local approach was better for local authorities.

The Monitoring Officer summarised the main themes of the report. Members discussed the report in detail and the following points were highlighted:

- Members agreed that local arrangements could be cumbersome, but the overall preference remained for swifter, locally managed processes.
- The Council currently publishes anonymised complaints logs twice yearly, with a biennial detailed report; with serious cases usually heard in public.
- Members emphasised the need to ensure that both complainants and Councillors receive appropriate support throughout the complaints process.
- There was support for introducing suspension powers, alongside consideration of whether a national appeals body would be required.
- It was agreed that only the most serious complaints should proceed to investigation, in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.
- It was noted that Independent Persons (IPs) provide valued input but were not voting members of the Standards Committee. Independent

Members (IMs) were co-opted with full voting rights in sub-committees.

- Members did not consider it appropriate for IPs to Chair the Standards Committee, as the role should remain with elected councillors.
- It was noted that vexatious complaints were rare, but Members agreed that these should be carefully managed and not dismissed too quickly, recognising the accountability of councillors.
- It was confirmed that complaints were published anonymously in logs. Members agreed that naming councillors could encourage vexatious behaviour.
- Members expressed mixed views on investigating former councillors, but there was supportive for continuing investigations in serious or safeguarding cases.
- Concerns about bullying by members was raised, with ensuing discussion on whether whistleblowing systems were sufficient enough to capture such issues.
- It was noted that staff often raised concerns via unions, and Members stressed the importance of ensuring staff feel safe to report misconduct.
- It was noted that the Committee did not collect systematic feedback from complainants.
- Members agreed that lessons should continue to be drawn from individual complaints, even where formal feedback was not provided.
- There was support for suspension powers, provided they were reserved for proven and serious breaches.
- Members agreed that sanctions should rest with the Standards Committee if it was within its jurisdiction.
- Views differed on who should inform constituents if a Councillor is suspended, with some believing it should be the group whip and others suggesting council officers.
- Members debated whether the Government should set a maximum suspension length, with the majority preferring local discretion.
- It was noted that suspensions were rare, and that the council has never had to impose one under the current arrangements.
- Opinions differed on whether Councillors should continue to receive allowances during suspension. Members supported restricting access to certain facilities if misconduct was directly linked to their use.

- Views of Members were mixed on whether allowances or access could be withheld without suspension, with some considering it proportionate and others preferring suspension as the clearer sanction.
- Members raised concerns about interim suspension powers, particularly where police investigations are ongoing, as it may be prejudicial. Members agreed that interim suspensions should include built-in review mechanisms to ensure they remain appropriate and proportionate.
- The Committee debated whether multiple suspensions within a five-year period should be allowed. It was noted that defining “gross misconduct” would be crucial.
- Members expressed openness to disqualification powers in the most serious cases, drawing comparisons with professional standards.
- It was agreed that appeals should not remain within the council but should instead be heard by a neighbouring authority or a national body.
- Members felt that five days was too short for appeals. Instead, a period of 21 calendar days was considered more appropriate.
- The existing system which allows for a second IP to review complaints was considered effective and Members supported retaining review mechanisms while avoiding unnecessary appeals.
- Members agreed that both complainants and Councillors should have the same rights in the process.
- Members did not support the creation of internal appeals panels, noting that the Standards Committee already fulfils this role.
- Concerns were raised about the risk of endless complaint processes.
- Members considered the Local Government Ombudsman to be the proper external route if complainants were dissatisfied.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Monitoring Officer compile a response with the questions and concerns raised by Members, to be submitted as a response to the Government Consultation.

6. COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS - UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer submits a report giving feedback on complaints against

Councillors reviewed and/or determined since the last meeting and updating the Committee on progress with outstanding complaints against Councillors.

The Monitoring Officer presented the report, noting that should Members wish to request further detail to the report, then the meeting could enter private session to consider further.

Members considered the report, and the following points were highlighted:

- It was noted that there were 34 contact attempts regarding complaints within the 2023-24 year, however that did not constitute 32 valid complaints.
- It was noted that a separate inbox for the Monitoring Officer dealt solely with complaints and that complaints included in the report were logged sequentially. Should a complaint not receive a response following being addressed by the Monitoring Officer, then the complaint would subsequently receive a follow up.
- In regard to one of the complaints, Members queried the surrounding detail of the complaint. It was noted that the Chair of the meeting had immediately requested that the remark in question be withdrawn. The Monitoring Officer believed that the response was appropriate for this occasion.
- It was noted that bar one complaint that was pending, all other complaints had been addressed and had concluded.
- The Monitoring Office clarified the process in which a complaint is dealt with, nothing that further escalation would see the complaint be brought to the Standard's Advisory Board.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no other urgent business, the meeting closed at 7:51pm.