

**Minutes of: STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:** 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**Present:** Councillor S Walmsley (in the Chair)  
Councillors A Booth, D Green, M Hayes, K Hussain, T Rafiq,  
D Vernon and M Whitby

**Also in attendance:** Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law and Democratic Services.  
Michael Cunliffe, Democratic Services.  
Independent Persons: Craig Ainsworth and Stuart Birtwell

**Public Attendance:** No members of the public or press were present at the meeting.

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**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted by J Gallagher, Head of Democratic Services.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & ANY MATTERS ARISING**

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023 were approved as a correct record.

The only matter arising was to arrange a code of conduct working group which took place in early November 2023.

**4 MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT-TASK AND FINISH GROUP REVIEW**

Jacqui Dennis, Bury Council's Monitoring Officer provided Members of the Standards Committee with the results of the Code of Conduct, task and finish group. This was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and the report included recommendations for elements of a revised code to be considered by this Committee in the first instance, then be considered by all Members at Council.

In early 2023, the Standards Committee proposed that a working group was established to review the current code of conduct and consider whether revisions should be made following the LGA's revised code of conduct.

The membership of the working group was made for up of 3 Members of the Standards Committee (one from each party), one independent person and the Monitoring Officer.

Consideration was given to review the Council's existing Code of Conduct for Members following the publication of the Local Government Ethical Standards report

produced by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) and the Local Government Association's (LGA) Model Code of Conduct (LGA's Model Code).

Documents used at the working group included:-

- The existing Bury code of conduct
- Proposals to comply with The Local Government Ethical Standards report Best Practice recommendations

The 15 Best Practice recommendations were analysed by the working group with explanations on how Bury Council already complies or what steps it should take in order to comply where it was considered appropriate.

The proposals submitted by the working group were included within the agenda packs.

The Monitoring Officer thanked the Members and independent person for their input at the working group and if the amendments were approved these would be ratified at Council in March.

It was suggested that as part of new Councillor inductions in May 2024 and providing training to existing Members, a helpful user guide to accompany the code should also be produced for Members to provide practical assistance to the code. This would be beneficial as any slight amendments to the user guide would not require a change to the code contained in the Council's constitution.

The topic of bullying and harassment was discussed again and the Chair referred to the ACAS code as a good definition to understand the term. The Monitoring Officer added that the current HR policy on this topic was currently being reviewed.

A discussion took place on some of the reasons for amendments being undertaken and the Monitoring Officer confirmed that independent people sitting on committees such as this are covered by the Council's insurance.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that the guidance document be included in a Standards Committee agenda on an annual basis and be added into the work programme for 2024-25.

A small number of minor amendments in relation to certain words, font styles and formatting would be checked by the Monitoring Officer before the final version was produced which would refer to the guidance document that would be produced by May 2024.

**It was agreed:-**

That the Standards Committee approve the updated and amended Model Code produced by the Monitoring Officer and the working group. A report would then be produced and submitted to the next Full Council meeting in March 2024 for approval.

## **5 COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS UPDATE**

The Monitoring Officer provided a verbal update to Members of the Standards Committee and gave a brief overview of Councillor complaints over the past year for

the Council. There had only been a few cases and the figures over the last 12 months were lower than previously.

Any reoccurring themes would be looked at with a view to tackling any issues via Member training.

On a different topic, Member safety was also discussed at length with a link to the rise in social media usage.

The Monitoring Officer intended to bring a report on Councillor complaints to a future meeting of the Standards Committee.

**It was agreed:-**

That the verbal update be noted.

**6 ETHICAL GOVERNANCE UPDATE**

The Monitoring Officer provided a verbal update to Members of the Standards Committee on ethical governance and was seeking Members views on the subject. Communication updates could be provided within one place on governance matters via a newsletter format.

The Chair stated this would be a good idea and making Members repeat training every 4 years after re-election would remind Councillors of any risks and the high standards of conduct required in the role.

It was suggested a one-page quarterly update would suffice and the Monitoring Officer was happy to tackle any issues or provide guidance on certain areas that Members suggested.

**It was agreed:-**

That the verbal update be noted.

**7 URGENT BUSINESS**

No urgent business was reported.

**8 NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next Standards Committee meeting was provisionally scheduled to take place at 6.00pm on Wednesday the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024 at Bury Town Hall.

**COUNCILLOR S WALMSLEY**  
**Chair**

**(Note: The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 6.55pm)**