

Minutes of: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 19 September 2024

Present: Councillor K Hussain (in the Chair)
Councillors A Booth, R Gold, M Hayes, J Hook, D Quinn,
T Rafiq and D Vernon

Also in attendance: Craig Ainsworth and John Birtwell, Independent Persons,
Jacqui Dennis, Monitoring Officer, and Phil Llewellyn,
Democratic Services Manager.

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor D Green

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were received from Cllr Green.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & ANY MATTERS ARISING

It was agreed that:

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 3rd April 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4 UPDATE ON TWO YEAR TERM OF OFFICE FOR INDEPENDENT PERSONS AND RECRUITMENT

Jacqui Dennis, the Council's Monitoring Officer, verbally updated Members on the Term of Office for the two Independent Persons and also provided an update on the recruitment process for the third Independent Person.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the two existing Independent Persons, Craig Ainsworth and Stuart Birtwell's terms of office had been extended for two years, effective from the Annual Council meeting in May. It was also advised that recruitment of a third person to help improve gender balance had not been successful, despite advertisement in the Bury Times and on social media.

The Committee discussed the matter and requested that the Monitoring Officer advertise the post again via social media and other channels.

It was agreed that:

1. The two year term for the Independent Persons be noted; and
2. That the Monitoring Officer progress advertising for the third Independent Person, using appropriate channels.

5 WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25

The Monitoring Officer presented the proposed Work Programme for 2024-25 for consideration by Members.

Members discussed the Council's training offer, both in person and on-line training and mandatory/core training, as well as the Leadership Offer (including LGA support) with the Monitoring Officer confirming that this was a matter for the Member Development Group, but that a report on the core training available and attendance/completion could be submitted to the Standards Committee.

It was agreed:

1. That the Work Programme as submitted be agreed; and
2. That a report on the training offer containing attendance/completion information be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

6 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2023-24

At this point of the Meeting, the Panel moved into Part B, having resolved under Section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of this item of business since it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as stated.

The Committee discussed the Annual Review Letter 2023-24 from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, which was publicly available, highlighting:

- 88% of complaints investigated were upheld, with 23 upheld decisions.
- In 92% of cases the Ombudsman was satisfied that the organisation had successfully implemented recommendations.
- In 9% of upheld cases the Ombudsman found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

The letter advised that during the year, two public reports about your Council the Council had been published. Both reports followed two previous investigations where the Council had agreed to update both its transport to education policy for young adults with special educational needs, and its policy on arranging education for children who were unable to access their normal provision. In both cases the Council did not implement the agreed recommendations, and the Ombudsman published the reports to highlight this.

The Ombudsman was pleased to note however that to note the Council had now implemented all the agreed actions and has reviewed both policies. It also noted the positive work carried out consulting on the draft policy for school transport, which included engaging with parent groups and other stakeholders.

In terms of the Council responding late to Ombudsman enquiries or provide incomplete responses, the Ombudsman welcomed the significant strides the Council had now made to improve its complaint functions, with the Monitoring Officer leading a centralised complaints team that oversaw all casework and compliance, and additional oversight and accountability provided by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Ombudsman was pleased to report that there were clear signs of improvement in the Council's performance; and in the final months of the reporting year, no reports had been received about delayed or incomplete responses to enquiries, and compliance with recommendations was being achieved in 100% of cases. The Ombudsman would continue to meet with the Council over the coming months to continue to monitor performance and provide support where needed.

Members of the Panel discussed the Letter and confidential appendices and noted the improving position, whilst noting the high number of SEND and EHCP assessments, which impacted on the complaints process. The Monitoring Officer reported on a focus on improvements relating to compliance, and that proposals relating to the adoption of the Complaints Handling Code would be presented before 2026.

At this point of the Meeting, the Committee moved back into Part A.

It was agreed:

- a) That the content of the Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter to the Council be noted; and:-
- (b) That the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman referred to the Council during 2023/24 and their outcomes be noted.

7 MEMBER ATTENDANCE STATISTICS

Members discussed the report submitted, and noted some discrepancies in the attendance figures, so it was agreed that a revised report would be submitted to the next meeting.

It was agreed:

That a revised report be submitted to the next meeting.

8 COMPLAINTS UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer verbally reported that there had been 22 complaints since the last Committee, and gave details of the complaints, many of which related to the same incident, and others were election related, with two involving social media. None of the complaints were upheld.

Members discussed the update and also referenced the Code of Code training that covered Social Media guidance.

It was agreed:

That the update be noted and the Social Media guidance be re-issued.

9 URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Urgent Business.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Next Meeting of the Committee would take place on 27th November at 6pm.

11 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

**12 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW
LETTER 2023-24**

See Item 6.

COUNCILLOR K HUSSAIN

Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 19.17pm)