



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

19 MARCH 2019

Report of: Borough Solicitor

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL REVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS

Wards affected: Borough wide.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise Members of the outcome of the national review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life into local government ethical standards.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the appended report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life be noted.
- 2.2 That the Borough Solicitor report to the next meeting of the Standards Committee with any necessary recommendations to ensure that the Council continues to exemplify best practice with regard to local ethical standards.
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3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 30 January 2019, the national Committee on Standards in Public Life (committee) published a report on local government ethical standards. The report follows a consultation by the committee in 2018 as part of its review of local government ethical standards.
- 3.2 Key findings, at a national level, include a number of concerns around the conduct of councillors and some parish councils; risks surrounding the current rules on conflicts of interest, gifts, and hospitality; and strains on local authority governance as a result of the increased complexity of local government decision-making.
- 3.3 The report also:
- Examines whether there is a need for a centralised body to govern and adjudicate on standards, concluding that, although there is room for improving

the standards system, there is no need to introduce such a body and local authorities should continue to retain responsibility for implementing the Seven Principles of Public Life in local government.

- Makes a number of recommendations to improve ethical standards in local government, including the publication of a new model code of conduct for local authority members by the Local Government Association and updating the Local Government Transparency Code to require authorities to publish yearly reports on the conduct complaints they receive.
- Notes that the current sanctions regime is insufficient and recommends increasing the remit of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in order to give it the power to investigate, make findings, and impose sanctions in code of conduct complaints against councillors. Alongside this, the committee recommends giving local authorities the power to suspend councillors, without allowances, for up to six months in conduct cases.

3.4 In addition to those recommendations, which will require legislative changes (such as the increased role of the Ombudsman), the report also makes 15 best practice recommendations for local authorities.

4.0 BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The national Committee on Standards in Public Life makes 15 best practice recommendations, listed at pages 18 and 19 of the report, for all local authorities to consider. The Committee advises that it intends to review implementation during 2020.

4.2 Accordingly, it is proposed that the Borough Solicitor report to the next meeting of the Standards Committee with any necessary recommendations to ensure that the Council continues to exemplify best practice with regard to local authority standards.

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder.

6.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no significant financial or resource implications arising from this report.

7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1 This item does not require a formal risk assessment and no changes have been made to risk registers as a result of this report.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and/or stakeholder. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendices

Appendix - Local Government Ethical Standards - A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.