



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

17 SEPTEMBER 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 consider the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and to recommend actions to ensure that the Council continues to exemplify best practice in local ethical standards.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life be noted and the actions set out in Appendix B be taken.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 On 30 January 2019, the Committee on Standards in Public Life published its report on local government ethical standards, reproduced at Appendix A (the Report).

3.2 The Report concludes that the vast majority of councillors and officers want to maintain the highest standards of conduct in their authorities. However, key findings, at a national level, include a number of concerns around the conduct of some councillors, 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, the majority of which will require legislative changes, the Report also makes 15 best practice recommendations for local authorities to consider implementing in advance of any legislative changes.

3.5 At its meeting on 19 March 2019 Standards Committee considered the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and resolved that I consider any necessary changes to the local standards regime in light of the best practice recommendations and report back to Standards Committee to ensure that the Council continues to exemplify best practice.

4.0 BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4.2 I have prepared a note, attached at Appendix B, which sets out:-

- Each best practice recommendation
- The context for each best practice recommendation
- The current position at the Council
- The proposed action in response to each best practice recommendation

4.3 It is pleasing to note the arrangements put in place by the Council already meet almost all of the recently announced best practice recommendations. However, to ensure that the Council continues to exemplify best practice in local ethical standards it is recommended that the actions set out in Appendix B are taken.

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

Appendix B – Best practice recommendations and recommended actions