

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

5 September 2023

Commenced: 4:00pm

Terminated: 4.35pm

Present: Mirriam Lawton (Independent person & Chair), Councillors , McNally, Lane, Kitchen, Costello and Parish Councillor Travis

In Attendance: Sandra Stewart Chief Executive

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Ricci and S Homer

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting on the 1 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.

3 ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Director of People and Workforce Development. The report detailed the proposed delivery plan for 2023-24 including mandatory elements, evening briefing sessions, e-learning, one to ones and attendance at external network events. The report also sought support for the refresh and relaunch of the Elected Member Development Strategy including the review and update of membership and sought support for the procurement of external providers to deliver key learning and development.

The Committee was advised that an Elected Member Development Strategy attached at Appendix 1 had been in place since 2018 and a key part of this was the collation of a skills audit questionnaire which was used in the One-to-One sessions with colleagues from Workforce Development. This practice had remained in place and has been undertaken following the recent all-out election in May 20223. Previous one-to-one discussions identified strengths and capacity of Elected Members to become a mentor, offer a one-off discussion or a forum to share their skills, knowledge and experience with other less experienced Elected Members.

It was reported that evening briefing sessions would continue to be offered to Elected Members throughout the year as a vehicle for sharing key updates and information. It was proposed that most evening briefing sessions would continue to be delivered face to face to ensure maximum engagement and participation. The topics of these sessions were set via recommendations from both Senior Officers and Elected Members to ensure that key updates were covered throughout the year. Session content was designed by the delivering service with support from the Workforce Development team, a pre-meeting would take place with the relevant officers and the Chief Executive to support the development of content and method of delivery, followed by further pre-meet and briefing with the Chief Executive and designated Cabinet Member. Appendix 2 detailed the proposed sessions for the year.

It was proposed that the service increased access to the external opportunities offered to gain a greater breadth of training and development experiences for Elected Members to ensure they had all the necessary skills to continue to develop as an Elected Member and to effectively fulfil their role. An overview of the offers available via current membership and also development offers which could be purchased are at **Appendix 3**.

All Elected Members would be required to undertake mandatory training relevant to their role to refresh and update their knowledge, skills and experience. These would be offered as either face to face development session conducted by the relevant officers, through E-Learning or through evening briefings

In regards to newly Elected Member induction training, all newly Elected Members received an Induction package, co-ordinated by Democratic Services following their election. It was proposed that Corporate Parenting training become part of the Induction package from next year, to ensure that all newly Elected Members are fully aware of their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent from immediately after they are elected. As a whole evening briefing session was conducted in March 2023 for Corporate Parenting, it was proposed that a further evening session is organised for this year as Induction had already taken place for this year.

All newly Elected Members were offered the opportunity to meet on a one to one basis after their induction with a member of the Workforce Development Team to discuss any individual development opportunities they would benefit from in their role as an Elected Member. Following one to one discussions, we have received requests for development in; handling challenging conversations and conflict, developing listening skills and creative problem solving, supporting development of digital skills and public speaking. Further feedback received included requests for the opportunity of a tour of Tameside One earlier on in the process to support with familiarisation of the building and meeting room locations.

Scrutiny Panel members were supported with training from the Policy Team particularly relating to the role of the scrutiny function, good practice etc. Additional training and support was also available from the Local Government Association (LGA), Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CGS) and North West Employers (NWE).

In addition to the internal courses, the Local Government Association had recently shared 23 modules of ELearning that has been built specifically for Elected Members, to deepen knowledge of local government and help with building leadership skills that are needed to work effectively within local communities. We have been able to make this available through the same MeLearning platform for Elected Members to access as part of their continued professional development.

RESOLVED

That the Standards Committee:

- (i) Agree proposed delivery plan for 2023-2024 including, mandatory elements, evening briefing sessions, e-learning, one to ones and attendance at external network events.**
- (ii) Support the refresh and relaunch of the Elected Member Development Strategy and Forum, including the review and update of membership.**
- (iii) Support the procurement of external providers identified in the body of the report to deliver key learning and development**

4 POLITICALLY RESTRICTED POSTS

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Director of People and Workforce Development. The report detailed the key statutory definitions of politically restricted posts and proposals to maintain compliance with legislation in this area by ensuring that where required, officers in specific roles were aware of the restriction to political activity. The report also detailed recommendations for amendments to contracts of employment and job descriptions for roles identified as politically restricted.

The report explained that there were two categories of politically restricted posts: specified and sensitive. The following persons were regarded as holding politically restricted posts:

- Head of the Paid Service
- Statutory Chief Officers, (including the Director of Children's Services and Director of Adult Social Services in England, the Director of Public Health, the Chief Finance Officer)
- The Monitoring Officer
- Non-statutory Chief Officers (officers reporting to the Head of Paid Service excluding secretarial/clerical support staff).
- Deputy Chief Officers (officers reporting to a Chief Officer excluding secretarial/clerical support staff).
- Officers exercising delegated powers as set out within Part 3a of the Constitution (see link in the table below).
- Assistants to political groups.

The report detailed that sensitive posts were defined in Section 2 (3) of the Act and were those which involved one or more of the following:

- Giving advice on a regular basis to the authority themselves, to any committee or sub-committee of the authority or to any joint committee on which the authority are represented, or, where the authority are operating executive arrangements, to the executive of the authority, to any committee of that executive, or to any member of that executive who is also a member of the
- Speaking on behalf of the authority on a regular basis to journalists or broadcasters.

The initial categorisation of sensitive posts had been undertaken with Assistant Directors for their services. Examples of sensitive posts included:

- Lawyer/Solicitor
- Democratic Services Officer
- Member Services Officer
- Electoral Manager
- Communications Manager
- Marketing and Communications Officer
- Policy Officer/Senior Policy Officer
- Scrutiny Manager

A politically restricted posts statement had been created (Appendix 1) which set out the specific restrictions placed upon holders of politically restricted posts. The statement will be issued to employees where a post is politically restricted.

Where posts were determined to be politically restricted, employees would receive notification which set out the restrictions that applied. Guidance would also be provided in relation to the appeals process for politically sensitive posts.

Where a new post was politically restricted, it was important that this requirement was identified at the point the post was created and that candidates were informed at the earliest stage of recruitment.

Current employees whose posts were identified as politically restricted would receive a letter advising of this with the appropriate information about political restrictions and the appeal process where relevant.

RESOLVED

That the Standards Committee agree:

- (i) **That the Council implements the Politically Restricted Posts statement as detailed in Appendix 1.**
- (ii) **That updates are made to contracts of employment and job descriptions for roles identified as politically restricted.**

- (iii) That employees who occupy politically restricted posts are provided with information and guidance to explain the restrictions, including the appeal process where relevant.
- (iv) To update the recruitment process ensuring job adverts and appointment letters include information regarding politically restrictions, where applicable.
- (v) The changes listed above will take effect from 1 November 2023.

5 REGISTER OF INTERESTS AND GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

Members were advised that the Register of Interests and Register of Gifts and Hospitality were available online for inspection and that there had been no recent declarations of gifts and hospitality received by Members.

6 DISCUSSION PERIOD FOR MEMBERS TO RAISE ISSUES (IF ANY)

The Chief Executive reported that a review of policies and code of conducts was underway and there would be a need for another meeting within the next 6 – 8 weeks to consider these changes.

Members of the Committee discussed the training requirement of Mossley Town Council Members, the Head of Organisation and Workforce Development agreed to meet Parish Councillor Travis to discuss any training requirements.

7 URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

CHAIR