

Ethics Committee

Meeting of held on Wednesday, 5 July 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

- Present:** Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel (Chair);
Councillor Brigitte Graham (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Mario Creatura, Helen Redfern and Esther Sutton
- Also Present:** Independent Persons Don Axcell, Ashok Kumar and Alan Malarkey
- Apologies:** Councillor Jade Appleton

PART A

35/22 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

36/22 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

37/22 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

38/22 Work Programme

The Interim Head of Democratic Services, Adrian May, discussed updates to the work programme.

RESOLVED to note, consider, and comment on changes to the work programme as detailed in the report.

39/22 Appointments to Independent Person Selection Panel

The Interim Head of Democratic Services discussed the paper presented at the last Committee meeting relating to the vacancy of an Independent Person. At Annual Council, Councillor Clive Fraser was appointed as a reserve to the Ethics Committee, so could no longer participate in the Panel. Therefore, the

officer asked the committee to revisit nominations and reappoint members to the panel to ensure a full complement of five Independent Persons.

Independent Person, Alan Malarkey added that the selection panel should make the role accessible to a wider range of candidates as he had found it formal and rigid. The members agreed noting that accessibility should be incorporated into the meeting room design for the panels and encouraged a pre-meet to take place before the meeting to mitigate the formality of the process.

It was noted that the Interim Head of Democratic Services would reflect the comments made by Committee members in the job advertisement to ensure accessibility and it was agreed that a copy of the advert would be circulated to all committee members prior to publication.

RESOLVED to:

2.1 Agree three Member nominations to sit on the Selection Panel: the Chair and two further Members to be nominated and agreed by the Committee. The committee appointed Councillor Ben-Hassel, Councillor Graham, and Councillor Creatura to the panel.

2.2 To note, Don Axcell, was previously nominated as Independent Person advisory support to the Selection Panel. This nomination was upheld.

2.3 Note the revised proposed time frame of the Independent Person/s recruitment and subsequent reporting back to this Committee prior to onward recommendations to Full Council.

40/22 Member Gifts and Hospitality

The Interim Head of Democratic Services discussed the Gifts and Hospitality report produced during the last reporting period. The purpose of the report was to review trends and patterns; however, the quarterly report failed to provide adequate information. For this reason, a detailed annual report would be created to assist with tracking themes. There was an update to Appendix 1 and during the next Committee meeting scheduled in November, a holistic quarterly review would take place.

Independent person, Ashok Kumar, asked about the process of scrutiny where a member failed to declare a gift. Adrian May advised that the process was dependent on the integrity of the Members to make a declaration or relied on challenge being raised by a member or member of the public via the complaints process. The quarterly newsletter was also highlighted as a tool

used to communicate the requirement to declare interests and gifts to all Members.

A member raised a question relating to how value was determined when the item declared had an unknown value. The Interim Head of Democratic Services answered that where value reporting was not met, a request was typically raised to the Member to revisit the declaration to provide details on the value's total. The officer raised that there were instances where councillors had refused gifts and hospitality of over £50 but failed to declare them.

RESOLVED to:

2.1 Note the requirements on Members with regards to declaring Gifts and Hospitality as detailed within the report.

2.2 Note any Gifts and Hospitality declarations made by Members' since 11th April 2023.

41/22 Update on Ethics Complaints Received In The First Quarter Up To And Including 31 March 2023

The Monitoring Officer, Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense, discussed the updates to Appendix A. The Appendix provided a quarterly update on alleged breaches of conduct during the period ending March 2023. It also detailed additional information on individual complaints received as requested during the last Committee meeting. The content of the Appendix was declared exempt from public discussion as it contained confidential information about complaints brought forward and had identifiable information. The Members commented that the level of detail presented offered a full illustration of issues raised and highlighted acceptable standards for councillors. The Monitoring Officer was asked whether the present volume of complaints was comparable with previous complaints logged by Croydon and other inner London boroughs. The Officer answered that more complaints had been raised in the last six months but overall, the number of complaints remained comparable with other London authorities.

RESOLVED to note the report contents.

42/22 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Councillor Ben-Hassel moved to exclude the press and public from the remainder of the meeting due to the likely disclosure of exempt information pursuant to paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A, Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972. This was seconded by Councillor Bridgette Graham and

RESOLVED:

that members of the Press and Public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that: (i) it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting ended at 7.15pm.

Signed:

Date:

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