

Report to Standards committee
17 November 2020

Report of Director of resources

Subject To introduce a written procedure for standards committee hearings.

Item

5

Purpose

To consider adopting a written procedure for standards committee hearings.

Recommendation

To adopt the procedure attached.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority healthy organisation.

Financial implications

To be funded from existing budget.

Ward/s: All Wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Kendrick - Resources

Contact officers

Rachel Crosbie, monitoring officer

01603 222313

Background documents

None

APPENDIX 13c

STANDARDS COMMITTEE: RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR HEARINGS

Interpretation

1. 'Member' means the member who is the subject of the allegation being considered by the Standards Committee, unless stated otherwise. It also includes the Member's nominated representative.
2. 'Investigator' means the Monitoring Officer or other investigating officer.
3. 'Legal Adviser' means the officer responsible for providing legal advice to the Standards Committee. This may be the Monitoring Officer, another legally qualified officer of the authority or someone appointed for this purpose from outside the authority.

Legal Advice

4. The Member may be represented or accompanied during the meeting by a Solicitor, Counsel or, with the permission of the Committee, another person.
5. The Committee may take legal advice from its legal adviser at any time during the hearing or while they are considering the outcome. The substance of any legal advice given to the Committee should be shared with the Member and the investigator if they are present.

The Hearing

6. After all the Members and everyone involved have been formally introduced, the Chair should explain how the Committee is going to run the hearing.
7. After dealing with any preliminary issues, the Committee should then move on to consider whether or not there are any significant disagreements about the facts contained in the investigator's report.
8. If there is no disagreement about the facts, the Committee can move on to the next stage of the hearing (paragraph 16 ie did the member breach the code?) Thus skipping points 9 to 15
9. If there is a disagreement, the investigator, if present, should be invited to make any necessary representations to support the relevant findings of fact in the report. With the Committees permission, the investigator may call any necessary supporting witnesses to give evidence. The Committee should give the Member an opportunity to challenge any evidence put forward by any witness called by the investigator.
10. The Member should have the opportunity to make representations to support their version of the facts and, with the Committee's permission, to call any necessary witnesses to give evidence.
11. At any time, the Committee may question any of the people involved or any of the

witnesses and should allow the investigator to challenge any evidence put forward by witnesses called by the Member.

12. If the Member disagrees with most of the facts, it may make sense for the investigator to start by making representations on all the relevant facts, instead of discussing each fact individually.
13. If the Member disagrees with any relevant fact in the investigator's report, without having given prior notice of the disagreement, good reasons must be given for not mentioning it before the hearing. If the investigator is not present, the Committee will consider whether or not it would be in the public interest to continue in the Investigator's absence. After considering the Member's explanation for not raising the issue at an earlier stage, the Committee may then: -
 - a. Continue with the hearing, relying on the information in the investigator's report;
 - b. Allow the Member to make representations about the issue, and invite the investigator to respond and call any witnesses, as necessary: or
 - c. Postpone the hearing to arrange for appropriate witnesses to be present, or for the investigator to be present if not already present.
14. The Committee will usually move to another room to consider the representations and evidence in private.
15. On their return, the Chair will announce the Committee's findings of fact.

Did the Member fail to follow the Code?

16. The Committee then needs to consider whether or not, based on the facts it has found, the Member has failed to follow the Code of Conduct.
17. The Member should be invited to give relevant reasons why the Committee should not decide that the Member has failed to follow the Code.
18. The Committee should then consider any verbal or written representations from the investigator.
19. The Committee may, at any time, question anyone involved on any point they raise in their representations.
20. The Member should be invited to make any final relevant points.
21. The Committee will then consider the representations in private and request those who are not part of the Committee to leave this part of the meeting
22. Once the Committee have considered all the representations the Chair will ask for those who had previously left the meeting to return and will announce the Committee's decision as to whether or not the Member has failed to follow the Code of Conduct.

If the Member has not breached the Code of Conduct

23. If the hearing concludes that there has been no breach of the code then the matter is resolved. There is no provision for appeal or review of that decision by the council or any other person.
24. If the Committee decides that the Member has not breached the Code of Conduct, the Committee can move on to consider whether it should make any recommendations to the authority.

If the Member has failed to Follow the Code

25. If the Committee decides that the Member has failed to follow the Code of Conduct, it will consider any verbal or written representations from the investigator and the Member as to:
 - a. Whether or not the Committee should set a sanction: and
 - b. What form any sanction should take.
26. The Committee may question the investigator and Member, and take legal advice, to make sure they have the information they need in order to make an informed decision.
27. The Committee will then consider in private whether or not to impose a sanction on the Member and, if so, what the sanction should be.

Possible sanctions include:

- (a) Censure or demand
 - (b) Report to full Council
 - (c) Recommendation to the council to remove the member from any position.
 - (d) Require the member to undergo further training
 - (e) Remove the member from external appointments and nominations.
 - (f) Withdrawal of facilities or services from the member including access to council premises and/or IT facilities.
28. The Chair will announce the Committee's decision.

Recommendations to the council

29. After considering any verbal or written representations from the investigator, the Committee will consider whether or not it should make any recommendations to the authority, with a view to promoting high standards of conduct among Members.
30. The Committee will announce its decision on the day and, where possible, provide a short-written decision. It will also need to issue a full written decision shortly after the end of the hearing.

Power to regulate own proceedings

31. The Chair of a hearings sub-committee has the right to depart from these arrangements where they consider that it is expedient to do so in order to secure the effective and fair consideration of any matter being dealt with at a meeting of the hearings sub-committee.