

**Minutes of the GMCA Standards Committee Meeting held
17 September 2019 at Churchgate House, Manchester**

Present

Geoff Linnell	Co-opted Independent Member
Councillor David Greenhalgh	Bolton Council
City Mayor Paul Dennett	Salford Council
Councillor Brenda Warrington	Tameside MBC
Councillor Andrew Western	Trafford Council

Also in attendance

Gwynne Williams	GMCA Deputy Monitoring Officer
Sarah Horseman	GMCA Head of Audit and Assurance
Nicola Ward	GMCA Governance

GMSC 19/09 Welcome and Apologies

Resolved /-

That apologies were received and noted from Councillor Elise Wilson and Nicole Jackson.

GMSC 19/10 Appointment of Chair

Resolved /-

That the appointment of Geoff Linnell, Independent Member as Chair for the 2019/20 municipal year be noted.

GMSC 19/11 Membership for 2019/20

Resolved /-

That it be noted that the following Members had been appointed by the GMCA to the Standards Committee for the 2019/20 municipal year, City Mayor Paul Dennett, Councillor Elise Wilson, Councillor David Greenhalgh, Councillor Brenda Warrington and Councillor Andrew Western.

GMSC 19/12 Terms of Reference

Resolved /-

That the Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee as agreed by the GMCA on the 28 June 2019 as part of the Constitutional review be noted.

GMSC 19/13 Minutes of the GMCA Standards Committee meeting held 12 February 2019

Resolved /-

That the minutes of the GMCA Standards Committee held 12 February 2019 be approved.

GMSC 19/14**Introduction to Internal Audit**

Sarah Horseman, Head of Audit and Assurance for the GMCA reported that she had been in post since April 2019, and asked whether there was any specific assurance that her team could provide to the Standards Committee going forward.

Members asked whether there had been any work undertaken in relation to the GMCA Whistleblowing Policy. It was confirmed that this policy was currently under review to ensure that it remained fit for purpose and that clear internal processes were in place.

Members also sought some assurance that although the GMCA is a relatively new organisation that the Internal Audit team are ensuring the right levels of due diligence, processes and protocols are in place and that matters such as fraud cases are appropriately referred to the Audit Committee. In addition, Members asked whether there was a role for the Standards Committee on such matters with respect to assessing behaviour and behavioural trends.

Resolved /-

1. That the GMCA Whistleblowing Policy and processes be brought to the next meeting of the GMCA Standards Committee.
2. That an annual report regarding whistle blowing and any particular trends or behaviours in relation to the Anti-fraud and Corruption procedures be brought to the GMCA Standards Committee.

GMSC 19/15**Committee on Standards in Public Life – Annual Report**

Gwynne Williams, Deputy Monitoring Officer GMCA took members through the highlights from the Annual Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life. She particularly drew attention to their comments that there remains a level of disparity between Codes of Conduct across Local Authorities and Combined Authorities but that a more detailed Code that goes further than high level principles, as adopted by the GMCA, is the most effective type of Code.

The report also discussed the availability of councillors' address details within the public domain as a disclosable pecuniary interest on the register of interests. Members confirmed that this information is no longer required on election material, and that councillors can chose to list the town hall address if they would prefer.

Members considered the position of a councillor when using social media platforms, and how the Code would apply. A range of opinions were shared relating to in what capacity comments could be made through a personal / professional page, and it was felt that although these lines appeared blurred, that whenever an elected councillor is in public that the perception would be that they were acting in their official capacity..

Members asked whether the sanctions for not adhering to the Code had any significance or could act as a deterrent to offenders. It was confirmed that previously sanctions included

disqualification and suspension from office, but that these had been removed in favour of softer sanctions including withdrawal of roles, removal from committees and requests for apologies. However, the report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommends the re-introduction of a suspension for up to a six-months as a possible sanction for non-adherence to the code.

A member asked for clarification as to whether there would be a right of appeal following a sanction of suspension and it was confirmed that the recommendation included the safeguard of an appeal to the LGO.

The report also covered the publication of registered interests and suggested that councillors should not have to withdraw from the discussion or vote on a matter unless the interest created a conflict.

With regards to declaring pecuniary interests, the report highlighted that there were some omissions in the statutory instrument, for example, the absence of a requirement to declare un-paid employment, hospitality and gifts and the pecuniary interests of other close family members. Furthermore in relation to gifts and hospitality, that current thresholds of £100 per gift should be re-viewed in order to look at collective periods of time to ensure that there are not regular patterns to gifting just below thresholds.

Members considered those declarations made at a local level, which may also arise at GMCA e.g. the cricket strategy. Members were advised that on such occasions, the interest should be declared in relation to specific agenda items.

A member questioned whether failing to declare an interest would be reported to the GMCA Standards Committee. It was suggested that a report on the arrangements for dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct is brought back to the GMCA Standards Committee.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed Members that the recommendations contained within the report would be monitored.

Resolved /-

1. To note the report.
2. That a report on the arrangements for dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct be brought to a future meeting of the GMCA Standards Committee.

GMSC 19/16

Review of the GMCA Members Code of Conduct

Gwynne Williams, Deputy Monitoring Officer for the GMCA explained that the Code of Conduct was last reviewed in November 2017, however the Committee on Standards in Public Life Annual Report makes useful recommendations regarding provisions on harassment and the use of social media which may be worth specifically considering in relation to the GMCA's code.

Resolved /-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the review of the GMCA Code of Conduct specifically looks at the use of social media and strengthening the section on bullying & harassment.

GMSC 19/17 Standards Committee Work Programme

Members of the Committee discussed the proposed work programme and considered the proposed items for future agendas. Items suggested for consideration at the next meeting included – the Code of Corporate Governance, Complaints reporting, Whistleblowing processes and the process of declaring interests.

Resolved /-

1. That the work programme be noted.
2. That the GMCA Standards Committee meeting in April consider the Code of Corporate Governance, Complaints reporting, Whistleblowing processes and Arrangements for dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct.

GMSC 19/18 Dates of future meetings

Resolved /-

That the GMCA Standards Committee next meet on Tuesday 14 April 2020.