

Committee	Dated:
Standards Committee	3 May 2019
Subject: Informal Meeting of the Standards Committee 03/04/2019	Public
Report of: The Town Clerk	For Decision
Report Author: Gemma Stokley, Senior Committee and Member Services Officer	

Summary

Following the resignation of a Co-opted Member of the Standards Committee, an informal meeting of the Standards Committee was held to discuss the issues leading to his resignation. This report sets out a summary of the main points raised by Members at this meeting and calls for wider discussion amongst the Committee on both these and proposals for the involvement of the Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider whether:-

1. it would be appropriate to formally request that the Audit and Risk Management Committee consider adding Standards issues to its risk register going forward; or
2. whether the Committee should simply seek the views of Audit and Risk on any matters it considers has risk aspects as suggested at the recent meeting of the Acting Chairman, two Co-opted Members of the Committee, the Chair of Policy and Resources, the Town Clerk, the Comptroller & City Solicitor, the Director of Comms and the Assistant Town Clerk.
3. To propose that the option to remove a member from a committee should be considered by that committee ahead of the Court of Common Council.

Main Report

Background

1. Following the resignation of a Co-opted Member of the Standards Committee in March 2019, the Standards Committee held an informal meeting on 3 April 2019 to discuss the issues leading to his resignation and the perceived disrespect shown to the Standards Committee more generally. There were no Officers in attendance at this meeting.

Current Position

2. According to information passed to the committee clerk, discussions at the informal meeting of the Standards Committee meeting of 3 April 2019 suggest that Members had concerns on two fronts, in particular:
 - a) Members of the Standards Committee could be targeted with unsubstantiated allegations. Such allegations could cause stress and humiliation to the individual concerned, as well as carrying a reputational risk for both them and the City Corporation. It was noted that Co-opted Members were in a particularly vulnerable position and that the Committee was in danger of being unable to recruit Co-opted Members in the future as a result. It was felt that the Standards Committee should consider ways in which the circulation of such material might be stopped. It was also felt that the current right of a Member to put a motion to the Court asking for the removal of a Member from the Committee should be reconsidered. Such a process allows a motion to be put forward by someone not in possession of all the facts. It was therefore felt that any such motion needed to be reviewed in the first instance by the Standards and/or Standards Appeals Committee and for there to be a transparent process in place; and
 - b) Support for the Standards Committee – Members felt that a negative culture towards the work of the Standards Committee had developed. To counteract this, it was felt necessary that the Court's leadership needed to show pro-active support of the Committee and its work. It was noted that a meeting had been arranged for 29 April for the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Standards Committee to meet with the Chair of Policy and Resources, the Town Clerk, the Comptroller and City Solicitor and the Committee's remaining Co-opted Members to discuss these concerns further. It was also suggested that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman should meet with the Chairman of the Audit and Risk Management Committee to discuss the possibility of including, on its risk register, the reputational risk to the City Corporation of the Standards Committee not being supported in fulfilling its remit.

Proposals

3. The meeting between the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Standards Committee and the Chairman of Audit and Risk Management took place on 11 April 2019 and it was agreed to put the following resolution to the Standards Committee meeting on 3 May 2019, with a view to it then being considered by the meeting of Audit and Risk Management in May 2019 if considered appropriate:

"The Standards Committee is concerned that the public criticism and lack of support shown it by the Court, could lead to a significant reputational risk to the Corporation. We consider this sufficiently serious for it to be considered a strategic risk and, therefore, request the Audit and Risk Management Committee to consider adding Standards issues to its risk register".

4. The meeting between the Acting Chairman, two Co-opted Members of the Standards Committee, the Chair of Policy and Resources, the Town Clerk, the Comptroller & City Solicitor, the Director of Communications and the Assistant Town Clerk took place on 29 April 2019. The Chair of Policy and Resources expressed the view that there was a need for further Member education. The Comptroller & City Solicitor advised that it was possible for the Court to agree any removal of Co-opted Members be first considered by the committee in question. It was also suggested that rather than standards issues being added to the risk register, the Standards Committee should simply seek the views of Audit and Risk on any matters it considered to have risk aspects.
5. It is now for the Standards Committee to decide upon the appropriateness of this action and whether to formally put a resolution to the Audit and Risk Management Committee or if it should simply seek the views of Audit and Risk on any matters it considers has risk aspects.
6. Members are also asked to discuss any further action they feel might be necessary arising from the issues leading up to the recent resignation of the Co-opted Member.

Conclusion

7. The issues leading to the resignation of a Co-opted Member of the Standards Committee were a cause for concern. Following an informal meeting of the Committee on 3 April 2019 to discuss this in greater detail, Members are now asked to take a decision as to what action, if any, they feel might be appropriate to address these concerns.

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