

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2022 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Paul Oatway QPM (Chairman), Cllr Allison Bucknell (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Andrew Davis, Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Cllr Bill Parks, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr Iain Wallis and Gordon Ball (Non voting)

47 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Julie Phillips (non-voting)
- Derek Walters

The Committee noted that Councillor Sam Pearce-Kearney and Councillor Pip Ridout were in attendance remotely via Teams, therefore they would not take part in any voting.

48 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2022 were presented for consideration.

Subject to an amendment to include Cllr Ian Wallis to the attendance, it was;

Resolved

To approve and sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

49 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

50 **Chairman's Announcements**

Positive Conduct Campaign

As part of the council's Positive Conduct, Positive Democracy campaign to promote high standards of behaviour amongst everyone involved in local democracy in Wiltshire, a public webinar was held in June which provided guidance on avoiding and resolving conduct issues. A video of the webinar was available on the website.

In addition, a Positive Conduct toolkit had been produced, containing a range of useful resources for councillors and clerks, and a Positive Conduct Charter, which the Chairman encouraged all Wiltshire councillors to sign up to, to demonstrate their commitment to the campaign.

51 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements.

52 **Wiltshire Council Complaints Report 2021 - 22**

The Committee received the Annual Complaints Report which provided a detailed picture of the council's complaints activity between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022.

The Committee noted the gradual reduction in complaints received over the past four years had continued, as had the number of complaints handled at Stage 1 of the corporate Complaints Procedure, with those handled at Stage 2 remaining stable.

There was small increase to the percentage of complaints upheld or partially upheld by the council, with Children's Services, Development and Building Control and Adult Social Care attracting the highest numbers of complaints.

There had been a slight increase in complaints received by the Local Government Ombudsman.

A new internal IT system to process complaints was expected, as were improvements to the Complaints webpage.

The Committee discussed the possibility of including statistics on financial aspects of compensation resulting from a complaint and requested that the data be included in future reports.

Complaints registered via the My Wilts app or other email addresses across the council were dealt with separately and did not form part of the statistics within the update. The Committee agreed that it was useful for service areas to know when there was a spike in complaints about certain issues so that they could respond.

The Committee also discussed the role of Division Members in resolving complaints and how well Wiltshire performed in dealing with complaints compared to other authorities of a similar scale.

It was;

Resolved

To note:

- **The Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2021-22.**
- **That formal complaints to the council have reduced by 41% since 2018-19.**
- **The actions to further improve the council's complaints handling function over the next 12 months.**

53 Changes to Protocol 6 of the Constitution

The Committee received the report on changes to Protocol 6 of the Constitution, to the current Corporate Complaints procedure, which at present was not compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's Code.

During discussion the Committee noted that the proposed document was more user friendly and comprehensive. It was also suggested that the procedure need not sit with the constitution to reduce future changes being required.

It was;

Resolved

To note the report and:

- **To note that the current corporate Complaints Procedure is not compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's new Complaint Handling Code.**
- **To note the comments of the Constitution Focus Group and Wiltshire Council's Housing Board.**
- **To recommend to Full Council that the amended 'Protocol 6 – Complaints Procedure' as outlined under Option 1 (attached at Appendix 2) is adopted to provide compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's new Complaint Handling Code and to make the Procedure more comprehensive and user-friendly for customers.**

54 LGA Model Code of Conduct Working Group Update

The Committee noted the report of the LGA Model Code of Conduct Working Group and considered the feedback in relation to comments from the Group Leaders.

The Committee discussed the differences between the old and the new proposed Code, specifically around para 8.4 relating to imposed sanctions and noted its support the enhancement.

If approved at Full Council the new Code would then form part of Positive Conduct Campaign, where town and parish councils would be encouraged to consider adopting it themselves.

Following discussion, it was;

Resolved

To note the report and recommend the Code of Conduct provided at Appendix A be adopted by Full Council.

55 **Status Report on Code of Conduct Complaints**

The Committee received the status report, updating on the number and outcome of Code of Conduct complaints received since the last meeting on 15 June 2022 and providing a summary of the complaints considered by the Assessment Sub Committee

There had been 9 Code of Conduct Complaints received by the Monitoring Officer during that period. Of these, 2 were determined No Further Action (NFA) by the Monitoring Officer, 2 were determined NFA by the Assessment Sub Committee, 1 was dismissed and the remaining 4 were due to be assessed by the Assessment Sub-Committee at its next scheduled meeting.

A chart showing Code of Conduct complaints received since 2019 was also included in the report.

A table of current cases had been provided to the Chairman on 10 August 2022 for a dip sample of cases to be undertaken to enable oversight.

After a discussion, it was,

Resolved:

To note the position on Code of Conduct Complaints.

56 **Appointment of an Independent Person**

The Committee noted the report as set out in the agenda.

A recruitment process to fill the vacant Independent Person position had taken place. A total of nine candidates had been interviewed and the panel had unanimously agreed on one candidate.

The Committee supported the recommendation that Full Council to appoint Mr McAllister to the position of Independent Person.

Resolved:

To Recommend that Council ratify the appointment of an Independent Persons following the selection process undertaken by the Standards Committee

57 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.30 - 3.20 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Lisa Alexander of Democratic Services, direct line 01722 434560, e-mail lisa.alexander@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114 or email communications@wiltshire.gov.uk