

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7 JULY 2020 AT ONLINE MEETING.

Present:

Cllr Ernie Clark, Cllr Peter Evans, Cllr Peter Fuller, Cllr Howard Greenman (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Cllr Paul Oatway QPM (Chairman), Cllr Fred Westmoreland, Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cllr Sue Evans (Substitute) and Mr Philip Gill MBE

Also Present:

Cllr Richard Clewer and Cllr Jo Trigg

1 **Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Derek Brown OBE. Councillor Brown was substituted by Councillor Sue Evans.

Owing to technical difficulties, apologies were also received from Richard Baxter, Michael Lockhart and Pam Turner.

Since the last meeting Councillor Jon Hubbard had been added as a Substitute Member.

2 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 were presented for consideration and it was,

Resolved:

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

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no announcements.

5 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted.

6 **Status Report on Code of Conduct Complaints and Covid-19 Update**

A report from the Monitoring Officer was received on the current status of Code of Conduct complaints.

It was noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic initially meetings could not be legally held and determination by Sub-Committees had been paused, but that following government regulation meetings had now been held, with more scheduled.

Additionally, it was noted that since 1 January 2020 the revised procedure for determining complaints under Protocol 11 had come into effect. The Committee noted the use of authority of the Monitoring Officer to resolve complaints without reference to the Sub-Committee.

Resolved:

To note the report from the Monitoring Officer.

7 **Constitutional Changes**

A report from the Monitoring Officer was received setting out proposed changes to the Constitution as recommended by the Constitution Focus Group.

The changes included updates to the Policy Framework following a review of its contents, and significant changes to the terms of reference to the Wiltshire Pension Fund Committee and Local Pension Board, to clarify their roles and responsibilities among other changes as detailed in the report.

The Committee accepted the recommendations of the Focus Group to amend Part 3B and Protocol 2 accordingly.

The Committee also noted that the Human Resources Code of Conduct had been considered by the Staffing Policy Committee, and as Part 15 of the Constitution would be recommended to Council.

Resolved:

To recommend Council approve the proposed changes to Part 3B and Protocol 2 of the Constitution.

8 **Local Government Association: Model Code of Conduct Consultation**

A report was received from the Monitoring Officer providing details of a consultation overseen by the Local Government Association (LGA). Following a report on Local Government Ethical Standards from the Committee on Standards in Public Life on 30 January 2019, which was received by the Committee on 1 May 2019, it had been recommended that that LGA create an updated model Code of Conduct. This was in advance of any legislative changes which were recommended by the same report.

The consultation would run from 8 June 2020 to 17 August 2020 and the Committee was asked if and how it wished to respond.

The Committee discussed the draft Model Code of Conduct. It was noted that the draft Code was more detailed than the existing Model Code, providing examples of behaviours which might be a breach, additional details on interests which should be registered and declared and other details which at present Wiltshire's Code did not contain, but were included in adopted guidance to its Code.

The Committee noted in particular the inclusion in the draft Code of sections relating to behaving with civility, and not bringing a council into disrepute. Some Members considered these reasonable additions, but others were concerned they were overly broad or proscriptive, or might enable trivial complaints. Members also debated the section on when the Code would apply, and if its description of when someone was deemed to be representing their council.

It was also confirmed in debate that it had been recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life that the imposition of sanctions for parish councils be a decision of the principal authority, however this would require changes to legislation and at present the principal authority could only recommend sanctions to the relevant parish council.

The Committee considered that the council should respond to the consultation, but wished to ensure political groups were made aware so that individual Members could respond directly if they wished.

At the conclusion of debate, it was,

Resolved:

To delegate preparation of a response to the LGA consultation to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman, to include seeking the views of Group Leaders.

9 Standards Assessment Sub-Committee

In accordance with the terms of reference of the Assessment Sub-Committee, the Committee reappointed the following Members to the Sub-Committee:

Councillor Richard Britton
Councillor Ernie Clark
Councillor Ruth Hopkinson
Councillor Fred Westmoreland
Councillor Stuart Wheeler

The Committee noted and endorsed the election by the Sub-Committee of Councillor Hopkinson as Chairman and Councillor Clark as Vice-Chairman.

The Committee also confirmed that Councillor Wheeler would continue to be the representative to the Constitution Focus Group.

10 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.05 - 3.00 pm)

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