

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 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 and Cllr Gordon King
(Substitute)

37 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Cllr Sam Pearce-Kearney, who was substituted by Cllr Gordon King.
- Cllr Mike Sankey
- Cllr Pip Ridout
- Gordon Ball (non-voting)
- Jo Cetti (non-voting)

38 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2022 were presented for consideration. It was;

Resolved

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

39 **Declarations of Interest**

In relation to item 6 - code of conduct complaints status report, Councillor Davis noted for openness, that he was included as a statistic within the update.

40 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman thanked Damian Kearney, one of the Independent Persons on the Standards Assessment Sub Committee for his contribution to the process, as he had stood down following a career change and relocation. A recruitment process was underway to fill the post.

41 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements.

42 **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 between 12 April and 7 June 2022 and providing a summary of the complaints considered by the Assessment Sub Committee since the last Standards Committee meeting held on 20 April 2022.

There had been 4 Code of Conduct Complaints received by the Monitoring Officer during that period. All were due to be assessed by the Assessment Sub-Committee at its next scheduled meeting on 28 June 2022.

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 11 May 2022 for a dip sample of cases to be undertaken to enable oversight.

The Committee requested an additional statistic be included in future updates, to show the length of time it took to inform the complainant and subject member when a complaint was decided to go to the Assessment Sub Committee.

The Committee agreed to review the current process timescales, as the requirement to resolve a complaint within 5 days was not always practical.

After a discussion, it was,

Resolved:

To note the position on Code of Conduct Complaints.

43 **Positive Conduct Campaign**

The Committee received an update on the Wiltshire Council campaign to promote positive democracy and councillor conduct across the county.

The campaign would include a webinar on 7 July 2022 providing useful hints and tips on promoting standards in public life and running positive local council meetings.

The initiative would include a Best Practice tool kit, to help demonstrate and encourage positive democracy among all elected members at county and parish level.

The council would also be looking at possible barriers that may be preventing good democracy, and offer guidance on how to hold positive meetings,

including support for clerks, with the aim of a reduction in complaints and an increased feeling of support.

It was,

Resolved

To note the update.

44 **LGA Model Code of Conduct Working Group Update**

At the last meeting, the Standards Committee considered a report and resolved to seek comments from the Constitution Focus Group (CFG) and Group Leaders on the proposed new Code of Conduct.

The Committee considered the comments received and discussed the recommendation as set out in the original report.

A summary of the CFG minutes were provided, in addition, one response had been received from Group Leaders.

The CFG had questioned the benefits in changing the code, questioning whether it would lead to behaviour changes given there was no change to legislation to allow sanctions.

The Committee discussed the longer-term effect of adopting a new code, in relation to future elected members, at parish and county level replacing those that retire. It was suggested that to proceed at a slower pace may be more appropriate.

The Chair of the Code of Conduct Working Group agreed that although sanctions were not available, this did not mean the council should cease to move forward with an updated code of conduct. The launch of a new policy with an educational programme would signal change.

The Committee agreed to invite all Group Leaders to attend a Code of Conduct Working Group meeting to provide their views, before making its final decision at the next meeting.

It was,

Resolved

To defer making a decision until the next meeting, to allow for the Code of Conduct Working Group to meet with Group Leaders to seek their input.

45 **Constitutional Changes**

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Constitution Focus Group (CFG) in relation to Part 3B of the Constitution, to adopt changes in respect of the Channel Panel.

Over the course of two meetings the CFG considered the proposals in detail and made a series of amendments, as set out in the report.

Subsequently the Director of Public Health, and Officers, had suggested some minor changes, such as to not specify the specific job titles to be listed in the constitution as they were often subject to change.

The Committee noted its support for a Members Briefing paper which was due to be circulated once the proposals were approved.

After a brief discussion, it was,

Resolved,

The Standards Committee recommend Council approve the changes to Part 3B as set out at Appendix 1

46 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items

(Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 2.50 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

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