

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL 2016 AT THE KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Julian Johnson (Chairman), Cllr Paul Oatway (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Rosemary Brown, Cllr Trevor Carbin, Cllr Howard Greenman, Cllr Sheila Parker,
Cllr Jerry Wickham and Mr John Scragg

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Desna Allen and Allison Bucknell, and from Mr Paul Neale, Miss Pam Turner and Mr Philip Gill MBE JP.

2 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2015 were presented for consideration. It was noted the proposed changes to the Code of Conduct in the constitution agreed at that meeting would be considered by Council on 10 May 2016, with a briefing for all councillors to be held on 4 May 2016, to include discussion of a possible alternative approach.

The minutes of the Standards Review Sub-Committee held on 18 February 2016 were also presented.

Resolved:

To APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2015 and receive the minutes of the Review Sub-Committee held on 18 February 2016.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman noted the recent passing of Councillor Jeff Osborn, and the Committee paid tribute to his extensive work as a member of the Constitution Focus Group.

5 **Public Participation and Questions**

There were no statements or questions submitted.

6 Status Report on Complaints

The Monitoring Officer presented a report on the current status of Code of Conduct complaints, together with a summary of the number and outcome of complaints for every year since the new Standards Regime came into force on 26 June 2012. The report also included a description of the type of complaints received during the last two years.

The Committee were advised on the number of investigations that had been decided on assessment or review, and discussed trends in respect of reasons for complaints. They, noted the robust procedure for assessment of complaints which prevented trivial complaints from proceeding further.

In response to queries it was confirmed in the case of complaints referred to the police in relation to potential criminal offences under the statutory requirements for registration and disclosure of interests, officers were working to develop a protocol with the police to assist in the processing of such matters.

Resolved:

To note the update.

7 Appointment of Co-Opted Non-Voting Members of the Standards Committee

The Monitoring Officer presented a report recommending the Committee to recommend Council to confirm the appointment of the existing four co-opted non-voting members of the Committee, for the reasons as set out in the report. This would take the term of the existing members up to the May 2017 local elections.

It was also agreed that the number, role and arrangements for appointment of the non-voting co-opted members should be reviewed, with recommendations to be made at the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2017.

Resolved:

To recommend Council:

- 1) confirm the appointment of the four current co-opted non-voting members of the Standards Committee at its Annual General Meeting on 10 May 2016 for their remaining term of office until the unitary and parish elections in May 2017. The members are as follows:**

Mr Paul Neale

Miss Pam Turner

Mr John Scragg

Mr Philip Gill MBE JP

- 2) **That the Standards Committee review the role, number and arrangements for appointment of non-voting co-opted members to the Committee and make recommendations to the new council in the light of the review at its Annual General Meeting in May 2017.**

8 **Extension of Term of Appointment of Independent Persons**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report recommending that the Committee extend the term of appointment of the three Independent Persons until May 2017, for the reasons set out in the report.

The excellent work undertaken by the Independent Persons in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities was noted. It was therefore:

Resolved

To recommend Council to extend the term of appointment of the three current Independent Persons for a further year until the Annual General Meeting of the new Council in May 2017 and to note that a recruitment process will be undertaken in advance of that date to recommend appointments to these positions.

9 **Recommendations from the Constitution Focus Group**

The Monitoring Officer presented two reports on proposed changes to the constitution following a meeting of the Constitution Focus Group, in respect of Part 12 of the Constitution - Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors - and Part 4 - Council Rules of Procedure.

The changes in respect of Part 12 related to the corporate parenting responsibilities of all councillors, and included a Corporate Parenting Strategy, with revised terms of reference for the Panel. The changes had been proposed by the Corporate Parenting Panel following an Ofsted inspection, in order to strengthen the council's priorities and processes.

The Committee then discussed the proposals. A concern was raised about the inclusion of a strategy within the constitution, which was not the Council's normal practice and which would clutter up the constitution unnecessarily. However, it was considered that the intention of including it was to raise the profile and importance of the corporate parenting responsibilities for all councillors.

As the constitution is now contained and accessed electronically, and by specific section, it was also considered there was less direct impact of including these additional details in this instance.

The detail of the strategy was debated, and whether the proposed changes to the structure of Panel meetings was appropriate. Queries were also raised on

how often the strategy would need to be updated and thus necessitating amendment of the constitution, and it was confirmed that as the strategy, which was for 2016-2018, is a policy framework document, it would in any case need consideration and approval by council in 2018, and so there would be no significant additional work.

In respect of the changes to Part 4 of the Constitution, as detailed in the report it was explained that the proposed changes were intended to make it easier for members of the public to register questions at council and committees, and to facilitate fully informed debate and decision making on motions at full council.

Resolved:

To recommend Council to adopt the proposed changes to Part 12 and Part 4 of the Constitution.

10 **Forward Plan**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme as detailed in the agenda, noting further constitutional changes were being proposed in relation to Finance and Procurement Regulations, aiming for approval at the July meeting of Council.

Resolved:

To approve the forward plan.

11 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 2.55 pm)

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