

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2016 AT THE KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Julian Johnson (Chairman), Cllr Paul Oatway (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Rosemary Brown, Cllr Trevor Carbin,
Cllr Howard Greenman, Cllr Sheila Parker, Mr Philip Gill MBE JP, Mr John Scragg
and Miss Pam Turner

Also Present:

Cllr Alan MacRae

12 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Horace Prickett and Mr Paul Neale.

It was also confirmed that following his appointment as Cabinet Member for Public Health on 27 June 2016, Councillor Jerry Wickham was no longer able to be a member of the Standards Committee.

13 **Minutes**

The Committee received the minutes of the Standards Review Sub-Committees held on 19 April and 15 June 2016, and considered the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 27 April 2016.

Resolved:

To approve and sign as a true and correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2016.

14 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

15 **Chairman's Announcements**

With the agreement of the Committee the agenda order for the meeting was altered to take the recommendations from the Focus Group as the first substantive item of business.

16 **Public Participation and Questions**

There were no questions or statements submitted.

17 **Recommendations of the Constitution Focus Group: Finance Regulations and Contract and Procurement Regulations**

The Committee received a report detailing proposed changes to the Financial Regulations in Part 9 of the Constitution and the Contract and Procurement Rules in Part 10. As detailed in the report and the draft minutes contained in agenda supplement 1, the proposed changes had been recommended for approval by the Constitution Focus Group.

Michael Hudson, Associate Director, Finance, was in attendance and gave a presentation on the proposed changes. It was explained the existing regulations had been reviewed in order to provide greater clarity and consistency resulting in better governance overall. The regulations set out the core principles, rules and standards that apply and these would be supported by a more detailed web-based manual for staff on how these core rules and standards are to be met. This would form part of a renewed council competency and training programme for all relevant staff on the financial governance framework.

A similar approach had been taken in respect of the Contract and Procurement Rules.

The Committee discussed the proposals, seeking details on the accessibility of the new procedure manuals and how the effectiveness of the new arrangements would be monitored, including oversight by Members.

Resolved:

To recommend that Council adopt the proposed new Financial Regulations and Contract and Procurement Rules in Part 9 and Part 10 of the Constitution respectively, and request the Audit Committee to review the implementation and effectiveness of the new arrangements.

18 **Code of Conduct**

Following a review of the effectiveness of the Council's Code of Conduct the Committee in September 2015 recommended Council to consider changes to clarify and strengthen the Code.

On 10 May 2016 Full Council asked the Standards Committee to consider a possible alternative proposal requesting full guidance from the Monitoring Officer assisting Members to meet their Code of Conduct obligations and to report back to the next meeting of Council.

The Committee received a report detailing proposed guidance on the provisions of the current Code, including the principles of public life; the duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct; explanation of specific provisions of the Code; use of social media; registration and declaration of interests; bias and predetermination and the complaints procedure and local assessment criteria.

The Committee discussed the proposed guidance and considered whether this approach would more effectively address the concerns identified previously by the Committee than making changes to the Code itself. Subject to some minor changes, in particular in relation to the declaration of charitable interests, the Committee was satisfied that the guidance approach would meet their overall objective of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and was therefore minded to recommend Council to adopt this approach. It was noted that the guidance would be reviewed as necessary to ensure that it remained fit for purpose and it was proposed that this would be approved through the Standards Committee.

The Committee was also informed that representations had been received on aspects of the code of conduct complaints procedure. This procedure had been in place since July 2012 and the Committee felt it would be appropriate to review its effectiveness to see if improvements could be made. It was proposed that this would be referred to the Constitution Focus Group to review and report back to the Committee. It was noted that parish and town councils would need to be advised of any proposed changes to the procedure given that parish and town councillor code of conduct complaints are required to be dealt with under the Council's procedure.

Resolved:

- 1) To recommend that Council makes no changes to the Code of Conduct but adopts the proposed guidance as attached to the report to assist Members in meeting their obligations under the Code.**
- 2) To ask the Constitution Focus Group to review the procedure for dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct and report back to the Committee with advice on any proposed changes.**

19 **Status of Complaints Update**

The Committee received a regular update on the number of Code of Conduct complaints received so far in 2016, along with details of outcomes and types of complaint.

Resolved:

To note the update.

20 **Forward Plan**

The Committee noted the Forward Plan as detailed in the agenda papers.

21 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.05 - 3.00 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Kieran Elliott, of Democratic & Members' Services, direct line 01225 718504, e-mail kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115