

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2022 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Paul Oatway QPM (Chairman), Cllr Allison Bucknell (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Andrew Davis, Cllr Matthew Dean, Cllr Bill Parks, Cllr Pip Ridout, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Derek Walters and Cllr Gordon King (Substitute)

Mrs Julie Phillips (non-voting) & Mr Gordon Ball (non-voting)

Also Present:

19 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Sam Pearce-Kearney (Substituted by Cllr Gordon King)
- Joanne Cetti (non-Voting Member)
- Kathy Barnes (non-voting Member)

20 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2021 were presented for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

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

21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

22 **Chairman's Announcements**

As part of a restructure within the Directorate Legal and Governance, the Complaints team has moved from Legal Services to Democracy and Governance, led by Maria Doherty, Head of Democracy and Governance and

Deputy Monitoring Officer. Henry Powell has now become Democracy and Complaints Manager.

The Chairman and Committee gave thanks to the Senior Solicitor, Paul Barnett for his work and support over the years as he was due to retire.

23 **Public Participation**

There were no statements or questions submitted.

24 **Review of the Code of Conduct**

The Committee received the report detailing the recommendations of the Constitution Focus Group for the Monitoring Officer to amend the Code of Conduct (CoC) as detailed under Paragraph 10 of the attached report. Notes of the Focus Group meeting held in October 2021 were attached.

The Chairman outlined the recommendation of the Focus Group, to replace an appendix document 'The Behaviours Framework' with the currently adopted 'Epic Values' document, as set out in para 10 of the report.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the options available to the Committee as detailed in paragraphs 11 and 12 of the report.

The Chairman noted his thoughts on Wiltshire Council's current CoC, in that he considered it to be weak and that it was not able to include any sanctions.

The Monitoring Officer advised that it was unlikely that Central Government would legislate to introduce sanctions.

There was a discussion regarding the freedom of Town and Parish councils to adopt different versions of the Code of Conduct to Wiltshire Council's which resulted in there being a varied selection across the county.

The interpretation of some sections of the CoC due to ambiguous language was discussed with suggestions for areas of improvement to bring better clarity and less room for individual interpretation, which was felt could lead to bad behaviour. There was an expectation for the Council to have a robust approach to the Standards Regime and not to refer to it as a light touch.

The New Model Code included guidance and was described as being modern and easy to read. There was mixed support of adopting a refined version of the New Model Code and it was suggested that a Working Group be formed to look further into this option and feed back its findings to a future meeting.

The Monitoring Officer noted that it was his intention to work with town and parish councils during 2022 to provide guidance on the CoC in an aim to improve a better understanding and consistency in behavioural standards.

The Committee considered whether there was any significant reason to change the currently adopted CoC or whether to approve it.

Cllr Gordon King joined the meeting but refrained from voting on this item due to not being present from the start of the discussion.

After the Monitoring Officer had summarised the options available to the Committee the Chairman moved the motion to form a Working Group which would carry out a review of the New Model Code and to present its findings at a future meeting for consideration. This was seconded by Cllr Allison Bucknell.

It was:

Resolved:

To note the report and ask the Monitoring Officer, supported by a Working Group of Members and Officers, to carry out a review of the new Model Code and feedback findings to the next meeting.

25 **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 2 June 2021 and a summary of the complaints considered by the Assessment Sub Committee since 15 June 2021.

A summary of the complaints received between the period of 2 June 2021 and 3 January 2022 and a breakdown of the 30 code of conduct complaints received during that period was also provided within the report.

A table of current cases had been provided to the Chairman on 8 December 2021 for a dip sample of cases to be undertaken to enable oversight.

The Committee discussed requests for additional information in future reports, where it was confirmed that the Democracy and Complaints Manager would be including additional data within the report at the next meeting.

The Chairman highlighted that in December he had undertaken a dip sample of 8 CoC complaint cases, of which almost all had been carried out on time. It was noted that the Monitoring Officer intended to look at speeding up the whole investigation process.

The Chairman noted his observations around the long hours in which some of the Officers were currently putting in to complete work.

After a brief discussion, on the motion of the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Bucknell, it was,

Resolved:

To note the position on Code of Conduct Complaints.

26 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 13:00 – 14:06)

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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