

STANDARDS

27 FEBRUARY 2019

Present:

Councillors Prowse (Chairman), Bromell, Evans, Keeling,
Councillor Dowding (TALC representative) and Smith (Independent Person)

Members in Attendance:

Councillors Clarence, Dewhirst and Kerswell

Apologies:

Councillor Dennis and Barnicott (Independent Person)

Officers in Attendance:

Karen Trickey, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer
Trish Corns, Democratic Services Officer

1. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Committee welcomed the newly appointed Independent Person, Amanda Smith to the Committee. The Chairman also welcomed non Committee Councillors and Town and Parish Clerks to the meeting. It was noted that Councillor Connett had apologised for not being able to attend.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. REPORT INTO THE REVIEW OF STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

The Chairman referred to the report circulated with the agenda relating to the published report into its review of the standards regime in local government, by the national Committee on Standards in Public Life. Key chapters covered matters affecting (i) codes of conduct (ii) investigations (iii) sanctions for breaches of the code and (iv) leadership and culture within local authorities relevant to standards. The Report of the national Review Group includes various recommendations to central government which will necessitate a change in the legislation set out in the Localism Act 2011. The Report promotes the retention of local authorities being responsible for their standards but advocates further guidance from central government. The guidance would include the introduction of a model code of conduct which local authorities might adopt, and a higher level of sanctions, with the reintroduction of a power to suspend councillors for up to six months.

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The Committee gave consideration to these recommendations as set out in Appendix C to the report circulated with the agenda. Some concern was raised in relation to a recommended sanction of a maximum suspension up to 6 months, and the potential consequential effect for the electorate, who could be unrepresented for this time. The Monitoring Officer addressed this concern by confirming that this would be the maximum sanction available and would not be imposed other than in the most serious of cases.

With regards to the timeframe for dealing with complaints the Monitoring Officer envisaged that complaints referred for investigation would be dealt with within 4 or 5 months of first receipt of a complaint which was somewhat shorter than had been the case at the Council on occasion.

The changes proposed in the national report advocated the introduction of a national Model Code of Conduct which local councils would either adopt or implement their own Code. It was proposed that town and parish councils in the district would have a choice to either adopt the District Council's Code or if different, the new Model Code.

Members of the Committee had differing opinions in relation to the recommendation of the national Review Group that councillors should no longer have to publish their home address. The Committee agreed with many of the recommendations and the best practice rules, including that the code should ideally address the use of social media.

Resolved

That the national report be noted that that the best practice rules not currently applied by the Council be incorporated into its practices so far as possible and the national report be noted.

4. REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Chairman referred to the report of the Monitoring Officer circulated with the agenda recommending a review of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and the associated complaints procedure, and training and Member development for councillors. It was considered that this would promote and maintain high standards of conduct, and was considered necessary for reasons set out in the report.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the recommendations of the review group would be presented to Council for consideration at the Annual Council meeting, if not before within the current civic year.

Resolved

- (a) A cross party task and finish group, consisting of one member from each political party and the two Independent Persons, is established to undertake a review of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and the associated complaints procedure.

Standards (27.2.2019)

- (b) A programme of standards training / member development is established for 2019/20 which all District Councillors are expected to attend, and that this provides opportunities for Town and Parish Councils.

CLLR ROSALIND PROWSE
Chairman