

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

26 FEBRUARY 2020

Present:

Councillors Keeling (Chairman), Bullivant, Haines, Nuttall, Peart, L Petherick

Independent and Parish Members

Mr G Barnicott

Ms A Smith (gave apologies)

Mr R Dowding (gave apologies)

Officers in Attendance:

Karen Trickey, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer

Sarah Selway, Democratic Services Team Leader & Deputy Monitoring Officer

Christopher Morgan, Trainee Democratic Services Officer

Paul Woodhead, Solicitor & Deputy Monitoring Officer

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor L Petherick was elected as Vice-Chairman.

4. STANDARDS HEARINGS

Members and those officers involved in administering and investigating the complaint referred to the last Standards Committee hearing discussed the current standards investigation process and reflected on the experience of the previous hearing in July involving Cllr D Cox. It was noted that members needed to (unlike in the last hearing) cooperate fully with investigations and hearings requirements including ensuring that relevant information was submitted and in a timely manner.

5. DISPENSATION REQUESTS

In light of the number of requests for dispensations that the Monitoring Officer had received over the last few months the Committee Members considered that the Standards Committee should consider all requests for dispensations from Members to speak and/or vote on a matter. These should be submitted in a timely manner to enable a meeting of the committee to be arranged in line with access to information legislation. The Monitoring Officer advised that she had anticipated a request to the Standards Committee from Newton Says No Members but none had been received.

RESOLVED that all dispensation requests from District Council Members be considered by the Standards Committee.

6. STANDARDS TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR MEMBERS

The Monitoring Officer outlined the five training events held for various groups of District Council Members since November 2019.

Members discussed Members' attendance at arranged training events, the need for Members to take ownership of their own development requirements and that standards training should be viewed as mandatory, in a similar fashion to that for planning and licensing matters. Members acknowledged that the Democratic Services team had started to develop a more focused Member training programme and that standards training would continue to form part of that scheme. The Committee considered it should illustrate the importance and need to promote and highlight high standards of conduct by referring to a requirement to attend training in the Council's current code.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the following be added to the General Obligations within the Members' Code of Conduct "*All Members must attend standards training as required by the Monitoring Officer.*"

7. CO-OPTED MEMBERSHIP OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Members discussed the co-opted membership of the two parish members as nominated by the Teignbridge Association of Local Councils (TALC) and the impact of any changes as a result of the civility in public life and the pending national review of the model code of conduct. It was recognised that the constitution provisions for membership of the Committee had not been reviewed for some years and the Committee should properly consider such taking account of the need to engage all parish and town councils in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by their members too. With this mind, the Committee concluded that the appointment should be limited to six months pending a review of the Committee's parish and town council representation.

RECOMMENDED to Council the TALC nominee – Mr John May – the second parish co-opted member be appointed for a period of six months

RESOLVED the parish and town council membership of the Standards Committee be reviewed within the next six months.

8. UPDATE ON PENDING CHANGES TO STANDARDS LEGISLATION

The Trainee Democratic Services Officer updated Members on the pending changes to standards legislation which would be considered by the Local Government Association (LGA) later this year, with then any recommendations on changes to be considered by the Secretary of State. This would include recommendations to seek increases in sanctions that were available to Standards Committee such as suspension from membership of the Council and banning Members from accessing council buildings or attending particular meetings.

Members discussed the proposals coming forward, the use of social media by the public, pressure groups and councillors; the need for respect for councillors and officers in and out of the Council Chamber which had been lacking on occasion in recent years and months having been the subject of considerable number of complaints; and the need for the Code of Conduct and all Council Members to support this.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee look to development a simple protocol with regards to the use of social media and officer member relationship to be appended to the Code of Conduct

RECOMMENDED to full Council to add to the Code of Conduct the following words *'you should give respect if you want to receive it'*.

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 11.19 am.

Chairman