

**Minutes of a meeting of Standards Committee
held on Monday, 4th March, 2019
from 6.00 pm - 6.23 pm**

Present: P Bradbury (Chairman)
C Ash-Edwards (Vice-Chair)

L Bennett
J Belsey
W Blunden

H Brunsdon
M Fielding
S Hand

A Jones
G Marples

Also Present: Dr David Horne, Independent Person on Standards Matters.
Mr Anthony Cox, Independent Person on Standards Matters.
Cllr L Stockwell.

The Chairman thanked all the Members of the Committee, the independent persons on standards matters and the officers for their contribution to the Standards Committee over the municipal year.

1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

2. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS

None.

3. TO RECEIVE DECLARATION OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA

None.

4. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2018

The Chairman noted a few minor amendments to the Minutes of the previous meeting namely and subject to these changes the minutes were approved.

5. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2018

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services, introduced the report which noted a quiet year in terms of complaints that he believed to be due to the lack of Neighbourhood Plans as it had been a big cause for complaint in previous years. He drew attention to guidance from the Committee on Standards in Public Life who published a report suggesting a voluntary Code of Conduct for Councils to follow as well as guidance over disagreements between clerks and a certain Member or Members of the Council. He highlighted that the government had indicated they would bring in requirements for candidates to be free from any sex offender registration or anti-

social behaviour order to be eligible to be a candidate in the May 2019 elections. Other events in Parliament seem to have delayed the enactment of the change and therefore eligibility criteria remains the same in 2019 as it was in 2015.

A Member enquired how much should the Council audits itself to identify the causes of complaints raised and expressed that the Council should make everyone more aware that if they have a complaint they should come forward. She also stated that there should be further sanctions than those already in place.

The Chairman noted that the answers to the Member's questions were included in the responses to consultation by the Committee for Standards in Public Life. He added that any implementation of further sanctions should be carried out on a national scale.

The Head of Regulatory Services explained that the complaints received in 2018 have focused on the Councillor personally and not on their role as a Councillor, highlighting similarities between that and the case of Ken Livingstone when he was London Mayor. The law says such complaints are not actionable.

A Member raised his concerns, a concern particular to him and other Members in his Ward, over the attacks received over social media. He highlighted the revealing of addresses and wondered whether the Council would be receiving more directives on that the use of social media. He also enquired what would occur if a Member in a single Member Ward was suspended for 6 months and who would pick up the issues and concerns of their constituents.

The Head of Regulatory Services that the responsibility for the ward would fall to the Leader in the short term however he would usually nominate a Councillor in a neighbouring ward to fill the gap for the duration of the suspension.

The Chairman noted that the issue of social media and believed that the option of not declaring the address of a Councillor is a step in the right direction. He wondered whether a section could be included in the annual report that if a Councillor is experiencing abuse, providing direction to information which can help advise them on the correct approach the issue.

A Member shared her concerns of social media as having seen certain material that could be constituted as a hate crime. She suggested whether there could be training for new councillors; not to alarm the new councillors but to advise them of potential abuse.

The Chairman believed that the topic should definitely be covered.

The Independent Person on Standards Matters advised about a recent committee of Standards in public Life that he attended and, although it related to Members of Parliament, made good recommendations for councillors and noted points where referrals could be made to national or local police. He said he would send the material to the Monitoring Officer for circulation to the Committee Members.

A Member requested the executive summary of the above report as she understood that it was a large report. She recalled previous experience of abuse when she was the chair of the planning committee at West Sussex County Council and advised that the police are a good resource.

The Independent Person on Standards Matters emphasised the need for training and highlighted the importance for bullying and harassment awareness.

A Member suggested approaching the administrators of social media community pages, where certain abuse takes place, to inform them of what is appropriate content.

The Chairman sought clarification over the necessity of standards training as he understood it to be mandatory.

The Head of Regulatory Services confirmed that all councillors will be provided with opportunities for the training.

A Member believed that Members should be given the option of receiving the training as he thought that it being mandatory would be a step too far.

Another Member was in agreement.

A Member felt that the training is its own incentive especially when there has been some who have experienced abuse on social media.

A Member suggested the training be based around help for the councillor rather than support for them. She highlighted training she had received at West Sussex County Council which she did not find help however thought role-play worked effectively.

A Member enquired whether there would be training available for parish councillors as there is not currently available to them.

The Head of Regulatory Services confirmed that he was willing to attend parish councils to provide advise on Code of Conduct upon invitation.

The Member stated that it would be helpful.

The Chairman summarised the discussion and requested that further introductory comments be included in the report; noted discussions over the abuse on social media and the inclusion of training for councillors to best manage potential abuse. He then thanked all Members of the committee for their contribution of the year.

RESOLVED

The committee recommend the 2018 Annual Report to Council for information subject to updating to take account of the debate above.

6. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN.

None.

The meeting finished at 6.23 pm

Chairman