

**Minutes of a meeting of Standards Committee  
held on Tuesday, 4th August, 2020  
from 6.00 pm - 6.34 pm**

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

A Bennett  
R Clarke

D Denham St Pinnock  
K Healy

A Eves  
B Von Thunderclap

**Absent:** Councillors L Bennett, H Brunsdon and P Cummins

**Also Present:** Dr David Horne, Independent Person on Standards Matters  
Ms Wendy Swinton-Eagle, Independent Person on Standards Matters  
  
Councillor N Webster.

**1. ROLL CALL AND VIRTUAL MEETINGS EXPLANATION.**

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services carried out a roll call to establish attendance at the meeting. He provided information on the format of the virtual meeting.

**2. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN.**

Cllr Clarke nominated Councillor Bradbury as Chairman of the Committee and this was seconded by Town Councillor Ash-Edwards. There were no further nominations and Councillor Bradbury was duly elected.

**RESOLVED**

Councillor Bradbury be elected Chairman of the Standards Committee for 2020/21.

**3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN.**

The Chairman nominated Town Councillor Christopher Ash-Edwards as Vice-Chairman and this was seconded by Councillor Healy. There were no further nominations.

**RESOLVED**

That Town Councillor Christopher Ash-Edwards be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Standards Committee for 2020/21.

**4. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Liz Bennett and Mr Cummins.

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

None.

**6. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 MARCH 2020**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2020 were approved as a correct record and electronically signed by the Chairman. The Chairman noted to use the pronoun “their” so any comments made by the Independent Persons are not identifiable.

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

None.

**8. REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services presented the report which introduced the draft amended Model Code of Conduct prepared by Local Government Association (LGA) in response to a request from the Government following suggestions from the Committee on Standards in Public Life as reported in January 2019.

He highlighted that any comments should be sent before the consultation period ends on 17 August. The Code of Conduct will apply across all councils within the county. The Localism Act 2011 remains unchanged and that currently prevents the committee imposing substantial penalties on councillors breaching the code. It was confirmed that more complaints had been received during lockdown. The current code is quite limited when it applies, and new legislation would be required if changes were to be made to its application. The Head of Regulatory Services confirmed that bullying had been included under the terminology of civility and that wording may be changed to one more appropriate. He expressed concern with the level of abuse on social media which may put people off from standing for an election. The code has been written in the first person, I, as the LGA expects all new councillors to sign up to the code at the start of their term of office. He confirmed the main difference with the council’s current code is the level of registration for gifts or hospitality received of £25, which dates back to 2007, Mid Sussex District Council set the level at £50 in 2016 to reflect inflation.

The Chairman asked the Officer to remind the committee about sanctions. The Head of Regulatory Services advised they are very limited. The Council can publish breaches of the code, invite councillors to participate in training but cannot suspend them. The proposal is to have the power to suspend councillors for up to 6 months and proposes writing to them to prevent their attendance at council meetings. He noted that Mid Sussex have not had to deal with such serious issues unlike other councils.

The Committee discussed the Model Member Code of Conduct from the LGA.

The Chairman highlighted the application of the revised code which could be applied more widely. The Officer outlined the incident involving the Lord Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone with a journalist outside a building following an official reception.

The journalist made a complaint and the High Court decided that the code of conduct did not apply as Mr Livingstone was not acting as the Mayor of London as he had left the meeting. He highlighted a recent complaint that the committee had dealt with that had happened away from the council, and the complainant thought the code should have applied to the member. He advised that any parts of the model code in brackets denotes that further legislation will be necessary.

The Chairman noted that councillors should not seek to unduly persuade officers to their point of view to the extent it could be perceived as bullying, particularly with regard to planning matters.

A Member expressed concern that the code does not take into account the current public health situation and the need for virtual meetings held by video. They suggested that it should include details on the standards expected of councillors during virtual meetings, i.e. keeping cameras turned on and the background to give a professional view. The Officer advised that the revised regulations state that, if possible, the public should be able to view the councillors taking part in the meeting.

Several committee members highlighted the Council's thorough protocol. It was thought that virtual meetings may be the way meetings are held longer term.

The Chairman noted that the committee was largely supportive of the document and their comments regarding virtual meetings could be added to their response to the LGA.

The committee discussed the use of social media which has been the cause of many complaints from councillors and the public. A committee member expressed concern that the revised code does little to reassure councillors if they become a victim of social media. The code notes the right to courtesy from the public but asked that the wording in the code be more robust. They noted the importance that councillors receive training on the appropriate use of social media. Several members of the committee confirmed that they and local MPs have been victims of abuse through social media.

The Officer confirmed that after the meeting a draft response to the LGA would be circulated to the committee detailing their comments on the proposed code relating to virtual meetings, the use of social media and clarity for the application of the code.

As there were no further questions the Chairman took the Committee to the recommendations which was agreed unanimously.

## **RESOLVED**

The Standard Committee considered the report and agreed to the above in their discussion.

## **9. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.2 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN.**

None.

The meeting finished at 6.34 pm

Chairman