

# **Minutes of a meeting of the Mid Sussex District Council Standards Committee held on Monday 10 June 2019 from 6:00 p.m. to 6:34 p.m.**

**Present:** Cllr Pete Bradbury (Chairman)  
Town Cllr Christopher Ash-Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Liz Bennett	Cllr Alison Bennett	Cllr Heidi Brunsdon*
Cllr Rod Clarke	Parish Cllr Karen Healy	Cllr Anne Eves*
Parish Cllr Baron Von Thunderclap	Parish Cllr Douglas St Pinnock*	

\* Absent

**Also Present:** Dr David Horne, Independent Person on Standards Matters.  
Mr Anthony Cox, Independent Person on Standards Matters\*.

## **1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

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

### **RESOLVED**

Councillor Bradbury be elected Chairman of the Standards Committee for 2019/20.

## **2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

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

### **RESOLVED**

That Town Councillor Christopher Ash-Edwards be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Standards Committee for 2019/20.

## **3. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr Anthony Cox, Councillor St Pinnock, Councillor Brunsdon and Councillor Eves.

## **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

## **5. MINUTES**

An Independent Member for Standards highlighted revisions to the penultimate paragraph in which he advised the committee of a report rather than a committee he had attended and that the good recommendations referenced in the paragraph related to a councillor's use of social media. Once the amendments were made, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 March 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

None.

**7. STANDARDS COMMITTEE BUSINESS 2019/20**

Tom Clark, Monitoring Officer, introduced the report which outlined the expected work of the Standards Committee in 2019/20. He noted that complaints usually arise from work on Neighbourhood Plans with councillors having interests in sites that are being brought forward, either with them being a land owner or having the site situated close to a councillor's house. Due to the nature of some small villages it is sometimes hard to not have an interest in land therefore dispensations are sometimes given out. Social media was also referenced as causing Code of Conduct complaints which this Council has not experienced that significantly however breaches usually make the national media. Failure to properly complete and update the declaration of interest form was another source of complaint.

The Chairman also highlighted the Committee's input on national legislation and referred to the committee's work during the previous municipal year where the committee made observations and recommendations to the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Committee decided roughly what other councils had thought and made recommendations to add further penalties such as writing a letter of apology or temporarily suspending the concerned councillor for a period of up to 6 months. The Chairman added that it is not a responsibility of the committee to tell Parish Councils how to run their Council and that the committee has previously advised on whether someone on the sexual offences register should be disqualified from standing from office. He asked the Monitoring Officer to explain how he deals with potential breaches of the Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer explained that if receives a report of an issue, he refers the report to an Independent Person for their advice. He would then ask for the councillor concerned to respond to the possible breach. If the complaint goes further, three members of the Standards Committee are asked to consider the issue and decide whether a potential breach has occurred. It would be their judgment to decide whether there has been a potential breach and whether this potential breach needs to be investigated further. The Deputy Monitoring Officer or a Monitoring Officer from another authority will then look at the breach, conduct an investigation and draft a report on the matter. The report is then taken to a Hearings Panel and it is for the Panel to decide whether a Code of Conduct breach has occurred and what penalties or suspension should be given. There is an appeal available which is dealt with by the High Court.

A Member enquired whether there is any recall petition for Members similar to that which was possible for the Member of Parliament.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that there is not.

A Member questioned whether there is training for councillors/councils on Code of Conduct issues.

The Monitoring Officer explained that there is training that can be given to a councillor as a punishment for breaching the Code of Conduct however he cannot force the member concerned to attend the training. The Chairman added that MSALC can provide training for councillors/councils on Code of Conduct issues.

A Member sought clarification on whether a Member would be allowed to sit on a Panel for Standards if the Member brought before the Panel is a Member within or near their ward.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that a Member would not be called to the Panel if the Member brought before the Panel is within or near their ward hence why the Standards Committee is formed of Members from all over the District.

A Member enquired how the Panel for Standards' Members are chosen.

The Monitoring Officer explained that he chooses who sits on the Panel but takes into account those who may have an interest in the Member concerned.

A Member queried if there was a need for political balance in the Panel for Standards.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that there is not a need.

The Chairman summarised the discussion and then moved to the recommendation to consider the report and note its contents which was agreed unanimously.

### **RESOLVED**

The Standard Committee considered the report and noted its contents.

### **8. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN**

None.

Meeting closed at 6:34

Chairman