

Minutes of the previous meeting for Standards Committee - Monday 21 October 2019

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Minutes of a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE on Monday 24 June 2019



Committee members:

Councillor Aziz
Councillor Pressel
Councillor Tanner (for Councillor Taylor)

Councillor Kennedy
Councillor Simm
Councillor Wade (for Councillor Gotch)

Officers:

Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer
Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager
Catherine Phythian, Committee Services Officer

Also present:

Dorian Hancock, Parish Council representative / non-voting member
Jill McCleery, Independent Person / non-voting

Apologies:

Apologies were received from Councillors Gotch and Taylor and Messrs Ballinger, Cole and Simpson.

1. Election of Chair for the Council year 2019-20

Councillor Aziz was elected Chair for the Council year 2019-20.

2. Election of Vice Chair for the Council year 2019-20

Councillor Pressel was elected Vice-Chair for the Council year 2019-20.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Code of Conduct: summary of complaints and individual dispensations - 1 February 2019 until 31 May 2019

The Monitoring Officer presented the information report on the number of complaints received under the Members' Code of Conduct and the number of dispensations to an individual member, granted under Section 33 of the 2011 Localism Act.

The Monitoring Officer referred the Committee to the Table at paragraph 4 of the report which summarised the two complaints that had been dealt with since 31 January 2019.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the first complaint (reference 14755) had been reassessed, in consultation with an Independent Person, and the conclusion reached was that there was no longer a public interest in pursuing this complaint. The second complaint (reference 15202) was under consideration; the outcome would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee. There were no particular lessons to be drawn from either of these cases.

The Monitoring Officer said that she was aiming to build stronger relationships with the Parish Councils and that she had met with two of the Parish Clerks to discuss parish matters.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that no requests for individual dispensations had been received.

The Standards Committee resolved to note the report.

5. Appointment of independent persons 2019

The Monitoring Officer presented the report which detailed the arrangements and progress on the appointment of Independent Persons in 2019. The Monitoring Officer said that there would be a second recruitment stage if this initial exercise proved unsuccessful.

The Committee emphasised the importance of reaching a wide range of potential applicants for the post of Independent Person to reflect the diversity of the city. They recommended promoting the vacancies through established contacts with local communities and the Council's partner organisations. They also suggested that a press release might be a positive promotional tool.

The Monitoring Officer agreed to act on these suggestions.

The Standards Committee resolved to:

1. **note** the progress on the appointment of Independent Persons in 2019;
2. **agree** to appoint the opposition member of the Standards Committee to serve on the interview panel as required at paragraph 5, ii) of the report.

In closing the Chair recorded the Committee's thanks to the four Independent Persons for the contribution they had made to the work of the Standards Committee and for the sound judgement and advice provided in support of the often complex and sensitive casework relating to Code of Conduct complaints. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that she would be writing formal letters of thanks to all of the Independent Persons.

6. Review of Member training in Quarter 1 2019/20

The Monitoring Officer presented the report which detailed the programme of training delivered to members in Q1 2019/20.

The Committee discussed the principles that should apply to compulsory training. The Monitoring Officer advised that there should be compulsory training on an annual basis for all members of regulatory committees to ensure that they were fully briefed on any regulatory changes and to protect the Council's position in the event of a decision being challenged. The Committee proposed that Safeguarding should be added to the list of compulsory training and noted that any financial sanctions relating to compulsory training would need to be referred to the Independent Remuneration Panel.

The Standards Committee resolved to note the review of the programme of training delivered to members in Q1 2019/20.

7. Update report - Committee on Standards in Public Life

The Monitoring Officer presented the report which provided an update on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) report on ethical standards in local government.

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that the Council's arrangements already encapsulated several of the recommendations and best practice proposals. She referred the Committee to the recent change in the rules applying to local government elections which had come in to force for the election held in May 2019. There was no longer any requirement for candidates standing as local councillors to have their home addresses published during the election process and included on the ballot paper.

The Monitoring Officer said that the Oxfordshire Monitoring Officer Group had discussed the report at a recent meeting, specifically in regard to the Members' Code of Conduct. They had agreed that they would not take any action in regard to those recommendations or best practice proposals for revisions to the Members' Code of Conduct until the government had issued a formal response to the CSPL report to ensure that any revisions addressed the content of the final recommendations.

The Committee asked questions about and discussed the implications of some of the recommendations, including but not limited to, the use of social media (Rec.3), the changes to disclosable pecuniary interests (Rec. 5) and the possible introduction of powers of suspension (Rec. 10 and 13).

The Committee noted that as many of the recommendations would require a legislative change, the timescales for which were uncertain, the Monitoring Officer would maintain a watching brief on the matter.

The Standards Committee resolved to note the update report on the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on Local Government Ethical Standards.

8. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee resolved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 February 2019 as a true and accurate record.

9. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates of the future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.00 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 16 September 2019