

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

7 July 2022

Present:-

Councillors M Asvachin, A Connett, I Hall, I Hipkin, A Mayes, R Saltmarsh, L Samuel, C Slade

Apologies:-

Councillors Sir Simon Day, R Hodgins and P Maskell

* 19 **Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Anne Mayes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Connett, and

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March be agreed as a correct record.

* 20 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 21 **Ethical Governance Framework: Monitoring**

The Committee received the report of the County Solicitor (Interim) ([CSO/22/9](#)) summarising feedback from Co-opted Members of this Committee on their attendance at meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees since the previous meeting monitoring compliance by Members and Officers with the Council's ethical governance framework.

Of particular note, which was pleasing, was reference to very clear reports, pertinent questioning, good comments and chairing. There was reference to intermittent use of microphones which along with issues of broadband quality might have contributed to poor sound quality which was supported by a member who also had difficulty listening into a meeting held in the council chamber recently.

The Committee were pleased to note that there had been no areas of significant concern or any indication of actions or behaviours that might be felt to have resulted in a potential breach of the Code, acknowledging also that steps would continue to be taken to address practical and procedural matters in light of Member's comments arising from both this and the previous monitoring reports in future training sessions.

* **22** **Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022**

The Committee considered the Report of the County Solicitor (Interim) (CSO/22/12) on the Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022 which updated the disqualification criteria for local authority Members.

Members were informed the Act, which came into force on 28 June 2022, explicitly disqualified individuals who were subject to relevant notification requirements or orders due to sexual offences from standing for or remaining in office.

There had been a reminder that the Committee had submitted a response to the consultation about the proposals for this and it was highlighted that the Council would also ensure that pre-election information would also be updated with this information and requirements for prospective councillors.

Members were pleased with the new legislation but expressed disappointment and concern that this did not apply to Police and Crime Commissioners and Members of Parliament and felt there should be the same standard applied across all those who stood in public office.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Connett and **SECONDED** by Councillor Bailey and **RESOLVED** that the Chair, write on behalf of the Council, to Government requesting them to bring in legislation that applied the same criteria to all local and national politicians.

* **23** **Committee on Standards in Public Life - Review of Local Government Ethical Standards and Government Response**

The Committee considered the Report of the County Solicitor (Interim) (CSO/22/10) regarding the Government's response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life Review of Local Government Ethical Standards.

Members recalled the Council had submitted a response to the consultation carried out by Committee on Standards in Public Life and the formal report had been published in 2019. This made several recommendations and in response to this the Council had reacted and revised guidance around bullying and harassment, adopted an annual review of the Code of Conduct, and published the gifts and hospitality register on Member profile pages, among other amendments.

The Government's response was that many of these suggestions did not need a legislative response but could be more appropriately, effectively, and swiftly taken forward by local authorities as best practice.

There was some discussion on this item which included:

- disappointment that many issues were being kept under review and lack of action, particularly with regard to offences committed

- public disclosure of members addresses – there was concern about the increase in abuse and intimidation experienced by councillors
- the threshold for determining non-disclosure of councillor addresses – it was clarified this was agreed by the Monitoring Officer who looked at requests sympathetically
- practice at other authorities in terms of disclosing addresses
- examples of first-hand experience of threatening and intimidating behaviour to members

Following the concerns and comments raised it was proposed and welcomed that further work be carried out by officers for options aiming to improve councillors' safety, including possible disclosure of addresses, and that a report be brought back for consideration of the committee.

* **24** **Local Determination of Complaints**

The County Solicitor reported that, since the last meeting, there had been five complaints concerning an alleged breach of the Members Code of Conduct had been received relating to County Councillor behaviour or lack of response.

The complaints raised included behaviour at a Parish Council meeting, failure to respond, unavailability, chairing of a committee meeting, and lack of courtesy and respect.

Following an initial assessment of each of the complaints and consultation with an Independent Person appointed by the Council, it had been agreed that in four of the five complaints there had been no breach of the Code.

The last complaint against Cllr Trail of failing to treat others with courtesy and respect was found to be a breach of the Code and he has accepted this and given an apology.

There was some discussion about the number of complaints and the Monitoring Officer was asked if he thought there had been an increase in the last year. It was felt there had been an increase and the majority of these particularly concerned a lack of response by Members. The meeting was informed that each complaint was looked at on an individual basis and assessed and so far, the Monitoring Officer had not found a breach of the Code based on a lack of response by a County Councillor. It was suggested that group leaders could be made aware of increase in complaints regarding lack of response by members to respond to accordingly.

NOTES:

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 2.59 pm