

# Standards Committee Minutes

Date: 19 February 2019

Time: 6.15 - 6.54 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor C Etholen (In the Chair)

Councillors: K Ahmed, M Clarke, A Collingwood, A Green and J Savage

Parish Councillors: Mr A Cobden, Mr T Nolan, and Mrs H Stearn

Independent: Mr C Morley

## 16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Carroll and Mr G Houalla.

## 17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 9 October 2018 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## 18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

## 19 COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE- LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION & REPORT

A report was considered which detailed the latest position with regard to the stakeholder consultation process on Local Government Ethical Standards and which requested that the report of the CSPL published on 30 January 2019 be noted.

Members were reminded that the CSPL had published a stakeholder consultation on Local Government Ethical Standards with a response deadline date of 18 May 2018. The review had considered all levels of Local Government in England including town and parish Councils, principal authorities and the Greater London Authority. In response to this detailed representations had been submitted by WDC from the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Standards Committee. These were attached at (Appendix A) to the report.

Following publication of the CSPL report on 30 January addressed to the Prime Minister, a total of 26 recommendations were made and along with a list of 15 best practice points. The key recommendations and conclusions were summarised at 1.8 of the report. Members were informed that many of the recommendations reflected the views expressed by WDC within its recommendations, whilst others

went further and were capable of being taken on board at the current time. Some however would require a change in the law to become effective.

It was further brought to Members` attention that with the advent of unitary local government in Buckinghamshire, the shadow council would have decisions to make around the development of its Code of Conduct and general standards regime. As such it would need to have regard to the recommendations and best practice points in the development of a code and procedure as part of its Constitution.

In considering the report before them, Members expressed a great deal of concern over one of the published recommendations which stated that Independent persons serving on Standards Committees should have fixed terms of only 2 years with one opportunity to extend for a further 2 years. It was argued that this was an insufficient amount of time for the independent member to become familiar with the policies, processes and procedures in place and that it would fail to provide the benefit of continuity that was required for this role. There was overwhelming consensus amongst Members that the Monitoring Officer should write to the CSPL on behalf of the Committee to request that this recommendation be reconsidered and to request that the term of office should comprise of an initial 5 year period with the ability to extend for a maximum of a further 5 years.

A Parish Councillor also voiced her concern over the need for Parish Councils to adjust over a short period of time to some fundamental changes which were likely to be implemented. As such it was agreed that parish councils would be provided with the summary of the recommendations by the CSPL, along with the best practice points. Furthermore it was agreed that it would be beneficial to write to parishes to ensure that they were following the practices brought about by the 2012 changes to the standards regime, and to highlight that further changes were anticipated in the near future.

**RESOLVED:** That

- (i) The Monitoring Officer write to the CSPL to request an extension to the fixed term office of the Independent Person to an initial 5 year period followed by a maximum of a further 5 years.
- (ii) Town & Parish Councils be reminded of the publication of the CSPL report, drawing particular attention to the bullet points contained in the Standards Committee report and that there be appropriate consultation with Town and Parish Councils when legislative changes are implemented.

**20 QUARTERLY UPDATE ON STANDARDS COMPLAINTS**

A report was submitted which provided an overview of complaints received about Member conduct complaint cases since the last meeting held on 9 October 2018. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that 3 new complaints had been made since then each of which had been completed at stage 2 of the process, none having proceeded to investigation. Members were informed that two other separate

potential complainants decided, following advice on the initial sifting process, not to pursue their complaints to the first stage.

The Monitoring Officer stated that overall there continued to be a relatively small number of complaints referred to for investigation which suggested that the need for good standards of behaviour was being taken seriously locally.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

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Chairman

**The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

Iram Malik - Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Julie Openshaw - District Solicitor