

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 8 March 2022

Present:

Councillor Nicholas Bennett MA J.P. (Chairman)
Councillor Vanessa Allen (Vice-Chairman)
Dr Simon Davey, Jonathan Farrell, Kath Nicholson,
Councillor Melanie Stevens and Councillor Michael Tickner

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Stephen Wells.

The Chairman reported that Mr Ken Palmer had tendered his resignation as Independent Person. The Committee thanked Mr Palmer for his service and contribution over the past two years.

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no additional declarations of interest.

19 QUESTIONS

No questions had been received.

20 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2022, were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies for absence from Councillor Tickner and the correction of a typing error.

21 MONITORING OFFICER'S GENERAL REPORT Report CSD22022

The report updated the Committee on a number of standards issues.

Independent Person

Following the resignation of Mr Ken Palmer, the Committee agreed that there should be a further recruitment process for an additional Independent Person. It was agreed that the recruitment process should commence after the May Local Elections and Member Induction process.

It was further agreed that Dr Davey's term of office would be extended to 31 July 2022 and the recruitment process would be further reviewed at the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

Mandatory Training for Licensing Hearings

Following the decision of Full Council to introduce mandatory training for Members sitting on Planning Committees, the Chairman suggested that similar mandatory training should be introduced for Members sitting on Licensing Hearings which fulfilled a similar quasi-judicial role. The Committee agreed that training for the whole General Purposes and Licensing Committee should be provided by Licensing Officers at the first meeting of that Committee.

The Standards Committee noted that elected Members would not be able to sit on Planning Committees and Licensing Hearings unless they had undertaken training (within the first three months of the election).

Election 2022: Induction for Members

The Committee noted that all Members would receive Code of Conduct Training on the 9th or 10th of May 2022 as part of the Chief Executive's induction session following the election. The Monitoring Officer provided assurances that at the first induction session there would be a key focus on the Code of Conduct and the requirements placed on Members.

A Member also suggested that in the event that a complaint (which was subsequently upheld) was made against a Member who had not attended training, one of the sanctions imposed should be mandatory attendance at training.

The Committee also agreed that Members should be required to sign into induction and training sessions. Where Members attended virtually, Officers should keep formal records of attendance.

The Standards Committee also recognised the role of the political groups in highlighting the importance of attendance at training.

Noting that Licensing training could be provided at the first meeting of General Purposes and Licensing, the Committee suggested that the Induction Session on 11th/12th May should focus solely on Planning, with further sessions held later in the year as necessary.

Consideration of Appeals Process for Members subject to complaints

The Monitoring Officer set out the Standards Complaints Procedure, explaining that there were a number of steps in the process prior to a formal hearing with a number of 'checks and balances' within the process through the involvement of the Independent Persons. The Monitoring Officer highlighted that the Localism Act moved to a more streamlined position and introduced more limited sanctions. As , in the view of the Monitoring Officer, the hearing should be the final position, although this could be kept under review.

The Committee requested that the position regarding a process for appeal and the options available be further investigated as some of the sanctions faced by Members could result in damage to public reputation.

Social Media Guidance for Councillors

Noting that the Code of Conduct was engaged only when councillors were acting in their official capacity and did not extend to their private lives, the Committee considered the possible consequences of elected members highlighting their role as Councillor on their private social media accounts. It was noted that this was something that could be reinforced during the induction process with training covering issues of perception.

A Member also suggested that the Social Media Guidance should include contact details for the Council's Public Affairs Team in the event Members required further advice.

RESOLVED: That

- 1. The recruitment process for an additional Independent Person be considered at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on 5th July 2022.**
- 2. Mandatory Training for Members sitting on Licensing Hearings be provided at the first meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee in May 2022.**
- 3. Members be required to sign into induction training and where Members may attend induction training virtually Officers keep a formal record of attendance.**
- 4. The options available for an appeal process be further investigated and reported to the next meeting.**

CHAIRMAN'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

Noting that it was the last meeting of the Committee before the election, the Chairman thanked Members and Co-opted Members for their contribution.

The Meeting ended at 7.51 pm

Chairman