

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 8 JULY 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray, Gary Cowan, Graham Howe and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Parish/Town Council Representatives:- Sally Gurney (Co-Optee, Wokingham Town Council) and Roy Mantel (Co-Optee Twyford Parish Council)

Officers Present

Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director, Governance
Neil Carr, Democartic and Elecoral Services Specialist

4. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Wayne Smith.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 4 March and 6 June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of apologies for absence from Sally Gurney.

6. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

7. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

8. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

9. PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Town or Parish Council questions.

10. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 11 to 16, which gave details of progress relating to Code of Conduct complaints since the previous meeting.

The report stated that, since the meeting on 4 March 2019, six new complaints had been received.

Appended to the report was a summary of progress against each of the complaints. Four of the complaints had been resolved and two were still under consideration.

Members sought clarification on the situation where Members under investigation lost their seats which meant that the investigation was terminated. Would an investigation be reopened if a Member was then re-elected? It was confirmed that further action was possible, but it would depend on the seriousness of the earlier complaint.

RESOLVED: That the update report on Code of Conduct complaints be noted.

11. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE - BEST PRACTICE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 17 to 20, which gave details of the Best Practice arrangements highlighted in the Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) on Standards in Local Government.

The report stated that the CSPL report (January 2019) had concluded that the vast majority of local government Members and Officers wished to maintain the highest standards of conduct. However, there were ongoing examples of bullying, harassment and disruptive behaviours.

The CSPL also identified risks around conflicts of interest, gifts and hospitality and expressed concern about the increasing complexity of decision making which put governance procedures under increasing strain.

The CSPL report included a list of Best Practice arrangements and suggested that each local authority compare existing arrangements against the list.

Andrew Moulton commented that the Council's procedures were generally in line with the Best Practice list. However, it may be appropriate for the Committee to give further consideration to the following issues:

- Best Practice 3 – annual review of the Code of Conduct;
- Best Practice 5 – update the Gifts and Hospitality Register each quarter;
- Best Practice 14 – greater transparency relating to Council-owned companies and arm's length bodies.

Andrew suggested that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee with suggested updates to the Code of Conduct, followed by a public consultation process in line with the Best Practice guidance.

Members requested that a review of the implications of Best Practice 9 – publication of the outcome of complaint investigations – be included in the report to the next meeting.

Members also requested further analysis of the implications of Best Practice 11 – complaints about the conduct of a Parish Councillor towards a clerk.

Finally, Members endorsed Best Practice 15 – Officers to meet with Group Leaders or Whips to discuss standards issues.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) progress against the CSPL Best Practice standards be noted;
- 2) at its next meeting the Committee consider a review of the current Code of Conduct including provisions relating to the publication of complaint decisions (Best Practice 9);
- 3) following agreement by the Committee, the updated Code of Conduct be the subject of consultation with residents, community organisations and neighbouring authorities;
- 4) the report to the next meeting also consider measures to comply with Best Practice 15 (transparency of Council-owned companies, etc.);

- 5) the Gifts and Hospitality Register be updated in line with Best Practice 5;
- 6) further clarification be provided on Best Practice 11 – complaints about the conduct of a Parish Councillor towards a Clerk;
- 7) Best Practice 15 be formalised through more regular meetings between senior Officers and Group Leaders/Whips.