

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 30 MARCH 2022 FROM 6.00 PM TO 6.20 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Kaiser (Chairman), Prue Bray, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Abdul Loyes, Daniel Sargeant (Vice-Chairman) and Caroline Smith

Parish/Town Council Representatives: Sally Gurney (Co-Optee, Wokingham Town Council) and Sheena Matthews (Co-Optee Earley Town Council)

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Jennifer Lee, Deputy Monitoring Officer

24. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Roy Mantel and Jackie Rance.

Sheena Matthews joined the meeting via Microsoft Teams.

25. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee, held on 24 January 2022, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the final bullet point in Minute 23 (Update on Complaints) being amended to read:

“It was noted that more examples of breaches, in an anonymised and redacted format, would be useful for the Committee to understand common themes and potential grey areas. **The examples would also be useful for wider Member training (including induction) for the Borough, Town and Parish Councils.** It was added that examples from other Local Authorities could be used, and miniature case studies could also be presented.”

26. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

28. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

29. PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from Town or Parish Members.

30. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 9 to 14, which provided an update on progress relating to Councillor Code of Conduct complaints.

The report stated that, since the last meeting of the Committee, one new complaint had been received against a Borough Councillor. A review of the complaint had concluded that

there was no breach of the Code of Conduct and, consequently, no further action would be taken.

As requested by the Committee, the Monitoring Officer had met with Town and Parish Council clerks to discuss measures to make Councillors more aware of the expectations of the Code of Conduct. This included the expectation that Councillors subject to complaints would co-operate with any investigation, as necessary. It was agreed with the clerks that the Monitoring Officer would develop an on-line training package for use by the Town and Parish Councils. The development of a Code of Conduct training programme for all Members would be considered at the first meeting of the Committee in the new municipal year.

Appendix A to the report set out details of progress against ongoing Code of Conduct complaints. Members considered the updates and raised the following points:

Due to lack of progress, two complaints had been referred to the subject Members' political parties (regional office). What was the purpose of this referral? It was confirmed that, if a subject Member was not co-operating with an investigation, referral to the relevant political party may help to deliver progress. A further update on the timeline and any subsequent progress would be reported back to the Committee. If the subject Member refused to co-operate, the complaint would be decided using the evidence available.

In relation to the complaints listed in Annex A, could a more effective numbering system be introduced? This would help to reduce confusion about the status of long running complaints. It was confirmed that a new system would be introduced for future reports.

Should the Committee agree a cut-off point for longstanding complaints where the subject Member was not co-operating? It was confirmed that this could be considered further. It was also confirmed that failure to co-operate with an investigation was, in itself, a breach of the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update on Councillor Code of Conduct complaints be noted;
- 2) the Committee consider the development of a Member training programme on the Code of Conduct at its meeting on 18 July 2022.

31. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

The Committee considered its Annual Report, set out at Agenda pages 15 to 22, for submission to WBC's full Council in May 2022.

The Annual Report provide a summary of the Committee's activities during 2021/22 including the number and type of Code of Conduct complaints received. The report highlighted the Committee's main objective which was to promote and maintain the highest standards of conduct by elected Members representing the Borough, Town and Parish Councils.

The Annual Report highlighted some of the key issues considered by the Committee during the year. These included the successful adoption of the LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct and a number of procedural changes relating to the handling of complaints following an independent review by Paul Hoey Associates.

In the ensuing discussion it was suggested that the Annual Report be updated to confirm that the proposed changes, following the independent review, had been approved by WBC's full Council at its meeting on 17 February 2022.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Standards Committee's proposed Annual Report be approved for submission to full Council in May 2022;
- 2) the Annual report be updated to confirm that proposed procedural changes, following the independent review, had been confirmed by full Council in February 2022.