

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 4 JULY 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.20 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Richard Dolinski (Vice-Chairman), Parry Batth, UllaKarin Clark, Dianne King and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Parish/Town Council Representatives:- Sally Gurney (Co-Optee, Wokingham Town Council)

Officers Present

Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Ken Miall.

Richard Dolinski chaired the meeting.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee, held on 8 March and 13 June 2018, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

7. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

8. PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Parish or Town Council questions.

9. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 9 to 14, which provided an update on Code of Conduct complaints. The report stated that, since the previous report to the Committee, in January 2018, one new complaint had been received.

The new complaint related to the alleged conduct of a Member prior to a public meeting in March 2018. Following an initial meeting between the Monitoring Officer, Chairman of the Standards Committee and an Independent Person, an independent investigation had been conducted. The investigation had found no evidence of a breach of the Code of Conduct. Consequently, no further action was taken.

The Committee discussed any broader training/learning issues arising out of the report.

Imogen Shepherd-Dubey suggested that, in cases where no further action was taken, the complainant should receive a more detailed reply setting out the reasons why the alleged behaviour was not found to be in breach of the Code of Conduct. Following discussion, the

Committee agreed that the provision of greater detail on the reasons for a particular decision would help to make the process more transparent and robust.

In relation to the discussion at the previous meeting on the consultation exercise being carried out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Monitoring Officer provided an update. The Committee on Standards in Public Life had carried out two roundtable events in April 2018. These events had highlighted a number of issues, including:

- The high level of variation in local authority Codes of Conduct;
- Consistency in the declaration of interests;
- Treatment of gifts and hospitality;
- Lack of stronger sanctions which undermined public confidence;
- Effectiveness of the Independent Person role;
- Increasing pressures on the Monitoring Officer;
- The importance of “culture” and the role of the Government in driving improvement.

It was expected that the Committee on Standards in Public Life would publish a report on Ethical Standards in Local Government later in 2018.

Members also considered the provision of a training session on Code of Conduct issues prior to the next meeting on 15 October 2018. This was considered to be useful as there were a number of new/inexperienced Members on the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update report on complaints and feedback be noted;
- 2) in relation to Code of Conduct cases where no further action was taken after the initial review, the Monitoring Officer provide more detailed feedback to complainants and other interested parties on the rationale for the decision;
- 3) the update on the review of Ethical Standards in Local Government, being carried out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, be noted;
- 4) a Code of Conduct training session be held at 7pm on 15 October, with the Standards Committee meeting to start at 7.30pm.