

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Morag Malvern (Chair), Rachel Burgess (Vice-Chair), Sam Akhtar, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and Caroline Smith

Parish/Town Council Representatives:- Sally Gurney (Co-Optee, Wokingham Town Council) and Jackie Jagger (Co-Optee Twyford Parish Council)

Officers Present

Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer

Neil Allen, Head of Legal

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

11. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Keith Baker, Phil Cunnington and Sheena Matthews.

12. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

15. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

16. PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from Parish or Town Members.

17. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 9 to 14. The report stated that, since the last update, in July 2023, nine new complaints had been received.

Only one complaint had resulted in finding a breach of the Code of Conduct. This complaint (WBC 6) had resulted in the publication of a decision notice on the WBC website and would be reported to full Council.

It was noted that all complaints are on track to be completed within the timescale that has been set out. With the three most recent complaints ongoing.

Looking at trends, the report showed that five complaints came from fellow councillors, three complaints related to social media, four complaints were connected to the meeting of the Executive in June 2023 and one complaint related to a parish councillor.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

- Regarding WBC 6, the report states that it will be discussed at Council, however, it wasn't due to timing. Members were assured it would now go to the next full Council meeting in November.
- Sally Gurney asked if there were any patterns regarding Councillor to Councillor complaints along party lines. She stated that from the outside, the Borough looks very party political. Andrew Moulton responded by saying he was happy to take that away and have a look into those trends.
- Councillor Sam Akhtar wondered whether complaints could show if the same person is complaining multiple times. Andrew Moulton said that it is something that could be looked at, as long as anonymity is kept.
- Caroline Smith asked whether there should be a trigger point where this Committee should look at the level of Complaints. Andrew Moulton noted that this was looked at two years ago, and that it should be up to the Committee to decide.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update on Code of Conduct complaints be noted;
- 2) Andrew Moulton report statistics regarding source of complaints to the next meeting of the Committee.

18. LGA DEBATE NOT HATE CAMPAIGN

Andrew Moulton gave a presentation to the Committee on the LGA Debate not Hate Campaign.

The Campaign relates to Councillors and people considering putting themselves forward in the future.

The presentation covered some key themes, these being Prevention and Support, Policies and Guidance, Training, Technology, Risk Assessment, engaging with the Police, Managing Councillor Information, Setting Expectations, Managing Public Narratives and Behaviour and Conduct.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

- Rachel Burgess said it is worth looking if more can be put in place to see when things tick over into abuse and recommends a survey to all Councillors to see how widespread the problem is. The Chair agreed with the idea of a survey. Andrew Moulton said that doing a survey would raise awareness among Councillors. Jackie Jagger added that a survey would help identify complaints that are justified. Sally Gurney asked whether the survey could be rolled out to Town and Parish Councillors. Andrew Moulton said he will take that up with the Town and Parish Clerks.
- Caroline Smith asked if there is an existing list of people that should be avoided. Andrew Moulton confirmed that there is currently no list.
- Sam Akhtar mentioned that it might be useful for Councillors to have a training refresher relating to personal safety.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the report on the LGA Debate not Hate Campaign be noted;
- 2) the Committee leads on the specific priorities for the Council to consider in response to the LGA's Campaign;
- 3) a survey to be circulated to all Borough Councillors with initial findings brought back to the next meeting of the Committee in January 2024;
- 4) Andrew Moulton discuss rolling out the survey to Town and Parish Councils with the Clerks.

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