

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Tuesday 10 January 2023 at 6.00 pm in The Telford Room, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

Present: Councillors G H Cook (Chair), A D McClements (Vice-Chair), A J Eade, N A M England, P J Scott and J M Seymour

In Attendance: R Attwell (Democracy Officer (Democracy)) and R Phillips (Service Delivery Manager, Legal & Democracy)

Apologies:

ST11 Declarations of Interest

None.

ST12 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

ST13 Committee for Standards in Public Life Annual Report

The Committee for Standards in Public Life Annual Report was presented by the Service Delivery Manager - Legal & Democracy.

The Service Delivery Manager explained that the Committee for Standards in Public Life (who are responsible for standards in national and local government,) provided information on how National Standard issues take place, and consequently how they filtered down to Local Government level.

The report discussed the work which the CSPL had undertaken between July 2021 and June 2022. The CSPL had in July 2021 published a review on the complex subject of the regulation of election finance. The review looked at the regulation and enforcement of donations and campaign expenditure by candidates, political parties and non-party campaigners in election campaigns. In doing so the CSPL wished to determine whether the current framework for regulating campaign finance laws was coherent, proportionate and whether the current system continues to deliver.

Members discussed the need for matters relating to ethical standards in Local Government to be reviewed at a local level rather than nationally. Whilst the Government and the Council recognised that decisions about standards were made at a local level, there was a strong feeling in local government that the applicable sanctions were not strong enough.

Members noted the report.

ST14 National Cases Update

The National Cases Update was presented by the Service Delivery Manager for Legal & Democracy.

The Service Delivery Manager highlighted a national case where Gilford Borough Councillors had been investigated by their Council's Standards-Sub Committee. In this case one Councillor had made inappropriate comments to a journalist. The Councillor had put forward the case that the comments were said within a private conversation. However, the Standards-Sub Committee found that the Councils code of conduct had been broken as he had not acted with respect. The Councillor involved in the incident was made to apologise and faced further sanctions for the incident.

The Service Delivery Manager outlined a second national case involving an activist in Sandwell. The activist had protested at a Full Council meeting against Councillors, believing them to be corrupt. An altercation ensued which resulted in one Councillor assaulting the activist. The Councillor in question, was suspended by their party while a criminal investigation took place. The Councillor was charged and convicted of assault. After the criminal investigation concluded, the Councillor was allowed to re-join their party and stand for election in their seat. Following re-election, the activist made a complaint to Sandwell's Monitoring Officer. At a Standards-Sub Committee investigation, where they found the Councillor of having breached the code of conduct by assaulting a member of the public, the Councillor was subject to sanctions including, losing Chairmanship of any Boards or Committees they chaired, as well as having to issue a formal apology.

Members noted the report.

The meeting ended at 6.27 pm

Chairman:

Date: Tuesday 11 July 2023