

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Tuesday, 5 February 2019 at 6pm in Meeting Room G3-G4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

Present: Councillors E Clare (Chair), S Barnes, A R H England, R T Kiernan and G C W Reynolds.

In Attendance: J Eatough (Assistant Director: Governance, Procurement & Commissioning and Monitoring Officer) and J Clarke (Democratic & Scrutiny Officer).

ST-01 Apologies for Absence

Councillors M J Smith and J C Ashford.

ST-02 Declarations of Interest

None

ST-03 Minutes

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 13 February 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

ST-04 Review of the Terms of Reference/Update Report

The Committee received the report presented by the Monitoring Officer which gave an update on the Terms of Reference, social media protocol, complaints and the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Terms of Reference

As this was the first meeting of the municipal year the Committee were required to agree the Terms of Reference. There were no suggested changes at this stage, but these may have to be reviewed following the outcomes of the Consultation Paper from the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Complaints

Since the last meeting in February 2018 sixteen complaints had been received. Three related to Parish Councillors, thirteen related to Borough Councillors and these were summarised in the report. None of the complaints had been deemed serious enough for referral. The inappropriate use of social media remained at the root of many complaints. There were currently two outstanding complaints.

Social Media Protocol/Training

Although no complaints had been referred for investigation there continued to be an ongoing issue with social media complaints. The revised social media protocol now included specific guidance on re-tweeting and “likes”. The protocol was a practical guidance for Members when using social media.

During the discussion some Members raised concerns regarding the use of colloquialism, the code of conduct not applying to candidates standing for election which put elected Members on an uneven playing field and the use of facebook for political purposes.

Committee on Standards in Public Life

A report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life on local government ethical standards was published on the 30 January 2019.

A brief overview from the report was that the role of the Monitoring Officer and Independent person would be strengthened and there would be a standard code of conduct prepared by the LGA and it would be recommended that this be used in order to set a framework for standards. There would be additions to the Local Government Transparency Code with a recommendation that an annual report be published, something already done by Telford and Wrekin Council. The current sanctions were insufficient and these would be enhanced by allowing suspension up to 6 months and the ability to stop allowances for the suspension period. Complaints would still be considered by Standards Committee but appeals could be made to the LGO. A gifts and hospitality register would be introduced although, again Telford and Wrekin currently holds a Register.

Parish Council codes would have to be aligned with the code of the principal authority and decisions on a parish councillor's sanction made by the principal authority Standards Committee would be binding on the Parish Council.

A more detailed analysis of the implications for the ethical framework would be brought to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) **the existing terms of reference was suitable and appropriate;**
- b) **the revised Protocol on Social media be agreed and circulate to all Members and Town and Parish Clerks; and**
- c) **the publication of the report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life on local government ethical standards be noted and that the Monitoring Officer to provide a more detailed analysis of the implications on ethical standards in Telford & Wrekin at its next meeting.**

The meeting ended at 6.34 pm

Chairman:

Date: