

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held on Tuesday, 4 February 2020 at 6.00 pm in Meeting Rooms G3/G4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

Present: Councillors A R H England (Vice-Chair), J Jones (Chair), R T Kiernan, P J Scott, J M Seymour and P Watling

In Attendance: J Eatough (Director of Governance), A Lowe (Service Delivery Manager for Legal and Governance Services) and J Galkowski (Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer)

Apologies: G C W Reynolds

ST6 **Declarations of Interest**

ST7 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

ST8 **Reviewing the Council's Ethical Framework**

The Standards Committee received a report from the Director for Governance on the review of the Councils Ethical Framework on items that fell within the remit of the Committee, as laid out in its terms of reference. Therefore the report focused on three specific areas; the Members Code of Conduct, the Member and Officer Protocol and the Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality. The first two elements are subject to Council approval, upon the recommendation from the Constitution Committee and thus the Standards Committee had a role in recommending changes to Constitution Committee. The Director of Governance took the Committee through each topic within the item, explaining advice given in the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report "*Local Government Ethical Standards*" and the Local Government Association (LGA) report titled "*Civility in Public Life and the Review of the Local Code of Conduct*" and how these were reflected in the recommendations made to the Standards Committee by the Director of Governance for updating the Councils Ethical Framework.

The report from the Director for Governance noted that there had been an increased level of threat of violence and intimidation towards Councillors locally and nationally which could undermine the principles of democracy, free speech and debate. Therefore Members were informed of a programme launched by the LGA which aimed to address these issues, which was available as a handbook if requested by Councillors. The report also outlined the broad strategy that was being developed by the Council which had three main strands; prevention, support and re-active support. This strategy included the resources and guidance that was available to Councillors at the

Council in staying safe in public and online. These resources included the Stay Safe App, a risk assessment for members and a PSP register.

Members noted the hard work that had been put into the report by the Director of Governance, and were satisfied with what they had heard. Members asked for clarity on the Gifts and Hospitality Protocol, and whether this would be extended to Parishes. The Governance and Legal Service Delivery Manager informed the committee that the policy update would not be extended to Parishes as they were responsible for their own register of Gifts and Hospitality, however the policy update could be circulated to Parishes and they were welcome to align themselves with it if they wished to. Members reflected on their experiences in regards to facing intimidation and defamation and asked what could be done should false information was spread regarding members. They were advised that the Council could not engage in defamation cases, however the Council was able respond in making it clear that certain behaviour was not acceptable, without engaging in specific cases.

RESOLVED – that;

- a) **Members noted and supported the LGA initiated work on promoting civility in public life, particularly in promoting progress towards an LGA sponsored model Code of Conduct;**
- b) **Members agreed to meet again when a draft model Code of Conduct was published for consultation to enable this Council to consider and respond to consultation on the development of the new model code of conduct;**
- c) **Members agreed to the adoption of a public interest test and decided that the date from which this test should be applied would be upon adoption of the new code;**
- d) **Members agreed that the Chair of the Standards Committee would sit on the recruitment panel for the Independent Persons as detailed in this Report;**
- e) **Members approved the constituent elements of consultation document to record the discussion between the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person during the consideration of whether or not to refer a complaint for investigation or informal resolution or no further action at all;**
- f) **Members approved new publicity requirements for determinations by amending the Hearings Sub Committee terms of reference to include "agreeing/delegating to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair, the publication on the Council's web-site of a statement detailing the outcome of a determination as detailed in the body of the Report";**
- g) **Members agreed that the Monitoring Officer would work with the Member Development Steering Group and Group Leaders to review the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations with a view to including an amended version through the Constitution Committee and on to full Council as an amendment to the Constitution.**

- h) Members reviewed the Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality and agreed to keep values contained in existing Protocol for Telford & Wrekin Council.**

The meeting ended at 6.57 pm

Chairman:

Date: Date Not Specified