

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

16 January 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillors Ayling, Batley, Kelly, Purser, Turner and Woodman

Also present were Independent Persons Mr John Cooke, Mr John Thompson and Mr Alan Ladley

449. WELCOME

The Monitoring Officer explained that he was opening the meeting as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee were unable to be in attendance. He explained the first business would therefore be for the Committee to appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair for the evening.

450. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

The Monitoring Officer explained that as stated in Part 5, Section 2, 3.1 (i) of the Constitution, the Committee needed to 'appoint a person to preside if the Chair or Vice Chair are not present'.

Councillor Kelly proposed that Councillor Woodman Chair the meeting, which was seconded by Councillor Turner.

Following a vote, this was declared CARRIED, and it was confirmed that Councillor Woodman would Chair the meeting.

Councillor Woodman proposed that Councillor Kelly should act as Vice-Chair for the meeting, which was seconded by Councillor Turner.

Following a vote, this was declared CARRIED, and it was confirmed that Councillor Kelly would act as Vice-Chair for the meeting.

451. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Huntley and May.

452. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

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453. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA WHICH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

There were no urgent matters for this meeting.

454. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

455. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No public questions had been submitted for this meeting.

456. MONITORING OFFICER REPORT - JANUARY 2025

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. He highlighted paragraph 4.2 'Maintaining the Constitution', explaining that he had amended the Constitution to reflect the changes to the senior management structure following the arrival of Dawn Hudd as Chief Executive in July 2024. He updated that Full Council had approved the recommendation from Standards Committee regarding the recruitment of the Independent Persons, and he had so far received support from all three Independent Persons on separate matters, which he thanked them for.

The Chair invited questions, and it was asked to what extent the Committee should be concerned that two of the town/parish councils were yet to adopt the model code. The Monitoring Officer explained that both of those councils had codes in place, however he would continue to encourage the adoption of the model code, which was beneficial to Councillors, particularly those that were members of additional councils, and it was also beneficial to investigations.

The Committee noted the report.

457. MEMBER LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. There had been no change to the training matrix since the last meeting. The Monitoring Officer had intended to provide information around the completion of online Data Protection Training with Hut Six, however he would circulate this separately to Members of the Committee the following week.

There were no questions from Members.

The Committee noted the report.

458. REVIEW OF MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. The review of ethical standards by the Committee for Standards in Public Life, undertaken in 2020, recommended that an annual review of the Members' Code of Conduct be undertaken. Each council could adopt its own code, but it must be based on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's seven principles, otherwise known as the Nolan principles. In 2020, the Local Government Association (LGA) developed a Model Code of Conduct, and the Council adopted this Model Code in March 2021. In December 2021 the Standards Committee considered the effectiveness and relevance of the 2021 Code and agreed that it was effective and appropriate and did not require a full review. In June 2022 the Committee reviewed the Code with a particular focus on Members' understanding regarding the disclosure of registrable interests. Comments were then taken into consideration when delivering the Members' Induction Programme following the May 2023 elections, but the Committee agreed not to incorporate these broader explanations into the Code. A regular report from the Monitoring Officer, presented to each meeting of this Committee, included an item on the monitoring and operation of the code. All town and parish councils within Arun district, apart from two, had now adopted the 2021 Model Code. A review of the Code was not undertaken in 2023 as it was felt that this was too soon after the local elections. It was for the Committee to decide whether they considered an internal review of the Code of Conduct was required.

Members were encouraged to respond to the government consultation launched on 18 December 2024 which sought views on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.

The Chair invited debate. Members were of the view that the Code seemed robust and fair, although it was suggested that this may need to be revisited once the results of the consultation had been announced.

An Independent Person felt all town and parish councils should sign up to the Model Code, as felt it created issues when not all councils were working to the same code

Councillor Purser proposed that the 2021 Code of Conduct is effective and appropriate and needs no review at this time. This was seconded by Councillor Batley.

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The Committee

RESOLVED

That the 2021 Code of Conduct is effective and appropriate and needs no review at this time

459. REVIEW OF COUNCILLORS GUIDE TO PERSONAL SAFETY

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. A report on Personal Safety had been presented to Committee in October, detailing concerns around safety. The Committee made a decision that Councillors would seek feedback from their groups, and this would be brought back to this meeting. The Monitoring Officer had not received any feedback. He informed Members that changes had been made to arrangements for some Committee meetings including Planning Committee and Licensing-Sub Committee. There were now a number of additional security arrangements in place, and the approach to those meetings depended on the assessed risk level. These changes had been implemented as a result of an incident at Planning Committee the previous year. Feedback from Members around these arrangements had been positive, and it was felt there was strong mitigation against potential future incidents, and identification of individuals involved in any such incident would be easier. The Monitoring Officer thanked the Committees team, the Facilities team and colleagues in technical services for their work on this. These new protocols would be kept under constant review.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the Vice-Chair, Councillor May, had indicated to him prior to the meeting, her intention to raise the question of potential training around personal safety. He confirmed he would therefore be arranging training for Members around their personal safety both in the Chamber during meetings and whilst carrying out their roles in the community.

The Chair invited questions, and it was asked whether a buddy system could be adopted, which it was felt would be beneficial to Councillors. The Monitoring Officer would look into this.

Councillor Woodman proposed that the Councillors Guide to Personal Safety is effective and appropriate and needs no review at this time. This was seconded by Councillor Purser

The Committee

RESOLVED

The Councillors Guide to Personal Safety is effective and appropriate and needs no review at this time

460. REGISTER OF ASSESSMENTS OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. He highlighted paragraph 4.2 which showed the complaints received, and the progress of each complaint. There had been a finding of no breach for some complaints, and a number of others were either in the process or would soon be going through formal investigation. The Monitoring Officer thanked the Independent Persons for their involvement in these. Another complaint had been received this week and he was in the process of considering whether this would be accepted. When looking at patterns and trends, the Monitoring Officer noted that most complaints related to Town and Parish Councillors, however some did involve Arun District Council Members.

There were no questions from Members.

The Chair thanked the Independent Persons for their work.

The Committee noted the report.

461. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 7.04 pm)