

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

3 December 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bennett (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Bower, English, Huntley (substituting for Cllr Coster), Kelly, Stanley (substituting for Cllr Blanchard-Cooper) and Tilbrook.

Independent Persons: Mr J. Thompson, Mr B. Green, Mrs S. Prail and Mr J. Cooke

[Note: The following Councillors were absent from the meeting during the consideration of the following matters set out in Minutes 229 – Councillors Bower and English.

227. SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

A draft Guidance document had been considered at the last meeting of the Committee on 24 September 2020 and recommendations to adopt a revised Social Media Guidance for Councillors had been made to Cabinet on 19 October 2020, replacing the previous version endorsed by Cabinet on 31 May 2016.

Although Cabinet had broadly supported the guidance, non-Cabinet Councillors raised some concerns about the content of the document. Cabinet then resolved to refer the Guidance back to this meeting of the Standards Committee for further discussion.

Mr Hoey referred to the list of “do’s and don’ts” in the draft Guidance document, which had been lifted from the existing Guidance document. This was the element that had been mostly challenged at Cabinet. It was the view of some Councillors that this may lead to debate being disadvantaged and would prefer not to have this entire list included in the document.

Committee questioned the item relating to criticism of Councillors and Officers. Mr Hoey referred to a definition supported by the LGA, as follows “Do not misquote, misrepresent or make personal criticisms of Councillors and Officers” which could be incorporated into the Guidance, which was then broadly supported by the Committee.

With regard to the ‘do not’ point regarding securing a benefit, Mr Hoey suggested replicating the words used in the Code of Conduct so that this line would now read “do not try to secure an improper benefit for yourself or disadvantage others improperly”.

Further discussion took place as to whether another ‘Do Not’ item should be added to cover ‘matters that had not been concluded at meetings, in view of the current situation with the recent Full Council meeting having taken place over three separate dates and as it had still not concluded all of its business. Comments were then made regarding inflammatory comments and concerns expressed that this could be subjective. Mr Hoey emphasised that this document was only guidance and had no legal weight.

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Following further debate, the Committee agreed to have the wording altered to the penultimate Do Not item to read as follows “do not try to secure an improper benefit for yourself or disadvantage others improperly”.

The Committee then

RECOMMEND TO CABINET – that

- 1) The new Social Media Guidance for Councillors, s amended at the meeting, be endorsed, replacing the previous version endorsed by Cabinet on 31 May 2016; and
- 2) To authorise the Acting Monitoring Officer to make any consequential changes arising from the adoption of a new Members Code of Conduct.