



Minutes of the meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER 2019 at 6.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor Miles (Chair)  
Councillors Alexander, P Geary (Vice-Chair), McPake (Vice-Chair) and Raja

**Officers:** S Bridglalsingh (Director - Law and Governance / Monitoring Officer), P Cummins (Head of Legal Services / Deputy Monitoring Officer) and J Crighton (Committee Manager)

**Apologies:** Councillors Akter, Khan, Small and Wilson and Parish Councillor Verma

**Also Present:** K Hulatt (Principal Solicitor - Litigation) and 3 members of the public

**ST17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 3 October 2019 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**ST18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None disclosed.

**ST19 PERIODIC REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

The Committee considered the periodic report of the Monitoring Officer.

The Committee noted the number of outstanding complaints, together with those that had been completed during the period October to December 2019.

The Committee expressed concern about the costs involved in investigating complaints especially when a breach had not been identified. The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the costs included the use of an external investigator and a competitive process had been undertaken to source the most cost effective investigator.

The Committee noted that the training undertaken at Olney Town Council on 4 November 2019, had been well received and a follow-up session had been arranged for six months' time.

RESOLVED -

That the report be noted.

## **ST20**

### **STANDARDS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

The Committee considered an update on the work of the Standards Working Group.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that feedback on the Best Practice Recommendations and appeals process had been received from Parish and Town Councils.

It was noted that the Working Group had previously agreed the majority of recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and, in light of the feedback received from Parish and Town Councils, the Committee agreed to further amend the recommendations.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Best Practice Recommendations be agreed.
2. That the changes to the Standards Appeal process be agreed.

## **ST21**

### **ANALYSIS OF TIMESCALES AND COST OF STANDARDS INVESTIGATION REPORTS**

The Committee considered a report on the analysis of timescales and cost of Standards investigations.

The Committee noted that investigations undertaken by a private solicitor, compared to those undertaken 'in-house' by a neighbouring Local Authority, were completed in a timely manner although they were more expensive.

The Committee was of the opinion that Parish and Town Councils should be made aware of the costs involved in investigating complaints, but not in a way to discourage complaints being submitted.

The Committee noted that mediation, in the form of an informal resolution, had been a satisfactory outcome in respect of a particular complaint. However, mediation could not be made compulsory as not all complaints were suitable for mediation.

RESOLVED -

That the recommendations be made on the instruction of Investigators in Standards Cases.

**ST22 WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20**

The Committee considered the Work Programme for the remainder of the Council year 2019/20.

RESOLVED -

That the Work Programme be noted.

**ST23 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Standards Committee would be held on Tuesday 10 March 2020 at 6.30 pm.

**ST24 HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES / DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER**

The Committee noted that P Cummins, Head of Legal Services / Deputy Monitoring Officer, would be leaving the Council at the end of December 2019 and expressed its thanks for his hard work on the Standards Committee.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 6.55 PM