

Minutes of the meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held on **WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2022**

Present: Councillor B Nolan (Chair)
Councillors Crooks, Geary, Imran, McPake, Smith and Wallis, and
Town Councillor Winsor.

Officers: S Bridglalsingh (Director of Law and Governance), C Stephens (Head of Legal), E Scott (Solicitor), P Brown (Head of Democratic Services) and A Melia (Senior Governance Officer).

Apologies: Councillors De Villiers and Nazir, and Parish Councillor Fisher.

SC03 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members of the public and councillors, advising that the meeting was being held at the Civic Offices and a recording of the meeting would be available to view post-meeting via YouTube.

SC04 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Councillor Crooks drew attention to the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022, particularly in reference to a number of points raised during workshops throughout the year which had been reiterated at the meeting. It was suggested that Councillor Crooks, in collaboration with the Director of Law and Governance, write a briefing note covering these issues to be presented to the Committee at a later date.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meetings of the Standards Committee held on 24 March 2022 and 18 May 2022 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

SC05 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Geary queried the possibility of declaring an interest at the meeting, as information regarding an outstanding complaint against a Councillor was withheld.

In response, the Director of Law and Governance advised that details of a complaint and the individuals concerned remained a private matter until the complaint had reached the legally appropriate point for such details to be disclosed.

Following this discussion, there were no declarations of interest.

SC06

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No questions or requests to speak on agenda items from the public had been received.

SC07

PERIODIC REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

The Director of Law and Governance introduced the report, welcoming the Chair and other new members of the Committee. The key points included:

- The report would be a standing item on each agenda and was designed to update the Committee on any work that had taken place between meetings.
- Since the Standards Committee meeting on 24 March 2022, only one complaint had been received. Contrary to the previous assertions, this complaint had not been concluded and remained ongoing.
- The report was intended to highlight the facts regarding a complaint against a Councillor, rather than to make decisions, as the full Standards Committee was not involved in the determination of any individual complaints.
- There were no complaints made against Ward Councillors in the reporting period, which was considered unusual within the recent period.
- On 4 July 2022, the Director of Law and Governance, in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer at Buckinghamshire Council, held a session on the Code of Conduct for Parish Councillors within the two Local Authorities.
- Since the Committee last met, Full Council had officially adopted the new Code of Conduct, with additional training on this code planned for all Members.

The Committee made comment and heard:

- Councillor Geary commented that, whilst the names of individuals could not be made public for ongoing complaints, it would be beneficial to note which Parish or Town Councils were involved, to allow Ward Councillors that may also hold positions within these authorities to declare any interests as necessary.
- Councillor McPake highlighted 6.2 of the report, which related to the establishment of a working group to consider the Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Allegations.

- In response, the Director of Law and Governance advised that the following item on the agenda dealt directly with this topic.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2021/22 be noted.
2. That the Director of Law and Governance be requested to consider an appropriate way to report anonymised details of standards cases that reflected the Parish Council of which the Councillor was a member.

SC08

REVIEW OF THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH STANDARDS ALLEGATIONS

The Director of Law and Governance introduced the report and advised that the arrangements represented the detailed instructions on how individual complaints are dealt with. Further key points included:

- In recent years, the high volume of complaints had provided the opportunity to test these arrangements.
- As such, it was now considered appropriate to review the arrangements alongside the newly adopted Code of Conduct in order to prevent inconsistencies.
- The recommendation to establish a working group to consider the arrangements was due to the resource intensive nature of this process.
- The Standards Committee was responsible for the Arrangements Procedure, and it would not sit within the Constitution.

Following the introduction, the Head of Democratic Services invited nominations for the politically balanced working group. With the agreement of the meeting, Councillors Crooks, Geary, and Nolan, alongside Town Councillor Winsor, were confirmed as representatives on the working group.

RESOLVED –

1. That a review of the Council’s Arrangements for dealing with Standards Complaints under the Localism Act 2022 be undertaken during the 2022-23 Council year.
2. That a politically balanced Councillor working group, supported by officers, be established to undertake a review of the Council’s Arrangements Procedure and that:
 - a) provisional membership would comprise Councillors Crooks, Geary and Nolan, and Town Councillor Winsor;

- b) authority be delegated to the Director of Law and Governance to finalise the arrangements for the working group; and
 - c) the working group should meet regularly and report their recommendations back to the Standards Committee.
3. That Parish and Town Councils be consulted on the review and that any feedback be considered as part of the final recommendations about the Arrangements Procedure.

SC09

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED –

That the Committee noted that the next meeting of the Standards Committee was provisionally scheduled for Thursday 29 September 2022 at 18.30.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 18:51.

Chair's Signature:

