

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Standards Committee held on Tuesday, 29 October 2019 at 10.00 am at Cabinet Meeting Room, Cumbria House, Carlisle

PRESENT:

County Councillors

Mr F Cassidy
Mr LN Fisher
Mr C Hogg

Independent Members

Mr S Sim (Chair)

Also in Attendance:-

Mrs L Davis	-	Democratic Services Officer
Ms I Puzio	-	Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer)
Mr R Worsley	-	Independent Person on Standards Committee

PART 1 – ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Mrs C McCarron-Holmes.

9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED, that the press and public be admitted to the meeting for all items of business.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures on interest on this occasion.

11 MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12 IMPLEMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDED BY THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

Members received a report from the Monitoring Officer providing an update on the implementation of best practice recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Members had been advised that the Standards in Public Life report contained some recommendations that required legislation or action by the Local Government Association, although a number of recommendations of best practice had been encouraged to be implemented immediately. The Monitoring Officer advised members of progress made to date in reviewing the position with regard to existing good practice. An early consultation with the Independent Person on all complaints had been implemented and a review of the complaints procedure was taking place. Members noted that the LGA guidance on Code of Conducts was awaited but the Cumbria Monitoring Officers' Group were taking some of the best practices forward.

Members, in discussion of the recommendations, noted that the gifts and hospitality register formed part of a members' register of interest and could be found on the Council's website. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that members had to register a gift and hospitality with an estimated value of at least £100. It was the intention to take a more proactive approach to remind members to update their register of interests.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a further report be brought to the Committee once the LGA guidance had been received.

13 SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR MEMBERS

Members received a report presenting the draft social media guidance and quick guide on the use of social media by elected and co-opted members that focussed on member conduct and legal issues.

The Monitoring Officer advised members that the draft guidance incorporated the views of the Committee on Standards in Public Life which recommended that when using social media members should adhere to the Nolan principles of public life. The principles were incorporated into the Members' Code of Conduct. The guidance also included advice from the Electoral Commission about how members who themselves become the target of harassment, intimidation or threats can protect themselves.

Members, in consideration of the draft guidance, discussed the difficulty in differentiating between public and personal social media use. The Monitoring Officer advised members to always have awareness of the Nolan principles and confirmed there was a social media policy in place for officers.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) that the draft guidance be agreed;
- (2) the draft guidance be circulated to the political group offices for comment prior to it being finalised by the Monitoring Officer.

14 MONITORING OFFICER UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer presented a report to members on complaints received since changes were made to the procedure for investigation of complaints regarding breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Members were informed that ten matters had been raised to date with the Monitoring Officer. She explained that six had not been pursued after the potential complainant had been asked to complete the standard form, one had been rejected by the Monitoring Officer as the completed form did not contain sufficient information to enable investigation and two had been resolved since the publication of this report and the meeting. A solution had been suggested to resolve the outstanding complaint.

It was noted that a review of the Protocol for the Investigation of Complaints would be undertaken to incorporate the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The complaints documentation on the Council's website would be assessed for accuracy.

Members suggested imposing a deadline for completion and submission of a standard complaint form and having the complaints information available in other languages. The Monitoring Officer agreed that more deadlines needed to be incorporated in the Protocol.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a review of the Protocol for the Investigation of Complaints be undertaken and deadlines be incorporated if appropriate;
- (3) the Monitoring Officer investigate having the complaints information available in other languages.

15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Standards Committee will be held on 5 December 2019 at 10 am in Cumbria House, Carlisle.

The meeting ended at 10.40 am