
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 14 June 2022 from 7.00 pm - 7.53 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Cameron Beart (Substitute) (Substitute for Councillor Lloyd Bowen), Roger Clark, Steve Davey (Vice-Chair), Nicholas Hampshire, Ken Ingleton, Elliott Jayes, Lee McCall (Substitute) (Substitute for Councillor Denise Knights), Hannah Perkin (Chair), Bill Tatton, Ghlin Whelan and Corrie Woodford.

Kent Association of Local Councils representative (non-voting): Mr Graham Addicott OBE.

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Robin Harris and Jo Millard.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Philippa Davies and Larissa Reed.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen and Denise Knights.

Independent Persons (non-voting): Mrs Patricia Richards and Mr Christopher Webb.

80 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

81 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 November 2021 (Minute Nos. 431 – 435) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The Minutes of the Standards Hearing Sub-Committee held on 25 April 2022 (Minute Nos. 761 – 765) were accepted by the Chair, subject to an amendment to Minute No. 764 to note that visiting Members who had joined virtually were ejected from the meeting.

82 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

Part B Minutes for Information

83 **Standards champions within political groups**

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which set-out the idea of the introduction of standards champions within political groups, which was first proposed by the standards working group in late March 2022. He explained that there was a 'grey area' in between cases that were clearly a breach of the code of conduct and others that could be classed as undesirable behaviour. The Monitoring Officer explained that the standards working group had proposed that each political group nominated one of its members to act as a standards champion. This would enable an issue, not serious enough to be referred to a standards hearing, to be dealt with informally. He highlighted paragraph 3.3 in the report which set out suggestions for a role description for the standards champions.

The Chair welcomed the proposed approach and invited members to ask questions and make comments. Points made included the following:

- Clarification sought on the process of any discussions with the standards champion;
- the new role would help to regulate members' behaviour towards each other;
- welcomed there being a 'first port of call' before an issue escalated;
- any possible offence could be subjective, dependent on the member's character;
- the standards champion would offer the chance for a conversation to start about a particular issue and enable working towards improving behaviour between members;
- considered all groups should have their own code of conduct; and
- there could be an issue if a potential complaint was against a group leader or a standards champion.

In response to a question, the Contentious and Corporate Governance Team Leader explained that a member would speak with the standards champion within their own political group, not with a standards champion representing another group. The Chief Executive outlined the benefits of having standards champions and said that an issue could be resolved at an early stage, before it got more serious.

There was some discussion as to when the scheme would come into effect. The Monitoring Officer suggested that members provided feedback to the Chair and him and this would be reported to the next Standards Committee meeting on 27 September 2022.

Resolved:

(1) That members discussed the idea within their groups and provide feedback to the monitoring officer with a view to agreeing a final version of the scheme at the next Standards Committee.

84 Member-officer protocol

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which set out a skeleton version of a member-officer profile. The report sought the views of Standards Committee members on the specific points the protocol would cover and how members and officers should be involved in the process of agreeing a final protocol. The Monitoring Officer explained that most councils had a protocol in place, and it could help build and maintain trust between members and officers. The protocol could also be beneficial to new members and officers and it would set-out what they could expect from each other.

The Contentious and Corporate Governance Team Leader drew Members' attention to the list set-out on page 16 of the report. He explained that officer behaviour was regulated under employment law, whilst, members were guided by the Council's code of conduct and he considered it appropriate for the Council to have a member-officer protocol.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments. Points made included the following:

- This was a good initiative;
- whereas not everyone read the constitution, this was a more concise document;

- welcomed the document now, especially as the Council had moved to the committee system;
- there was sometimes an issue with how long a matter took to get resolved by officers;
- it would be good to have a working group to investigate this further; and
- welcomed the historic scheme of 'you-said, we-did' within the council.

In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer said that service standards could be a part of the protocol from both members' and officers' point of view. He also explained that there was a Council staff engagement group and this could work with the standards working group.

Resolved:

(1) That a member-officer protocol was supported.

(2) That a working group be set-up and they consult with the staff engagement group.

85 Committee work programme 2022/23

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which outlined the work programme of the Standards Committee over the coming municipal year, and sought members' views on the appropriateness of the programme. He explained that meetings would now be held quarterly, rather than annually. The Monitoring Officer drew attention to the proposed agenda items for each meeting, set-out on page 20 of the report.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

86 Membership of standards working group 2022/23

The Monitoring Officer explained that the standards working group was an informal group, that usually met at short notice for an informal steer on matters related to the Standards Committee. He explained that the group was broadly politically balanced and he invited nominations from each group to sit on the working group from within the Standards Committee membership.

Resolved:

(1) Membership of the standards working group confirmed as: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Steve Davey, Ken Ingleton, Elliott Jayes, Hannah Perkin and Bill Tatton, with confirmation of a nomination from the Independent Group to follow.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel