

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held on 11 December 2024 at 5.15 pm

Present

Councillors

A Glover (Chair)
E Buczkowski (Vice-Chair), J Buczkowski,
F J Colthorpe, G Czapiewski, M Fletcher,
L Taylor, N Woollatt and D Wulff

Apologies

Councillor(s)

Also Present

Councillor

B Holdman

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Maria De Leiburne (Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) and Laura Woon (Democratic Service Officer)

Councillor

Online

J Lock

14 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies received.

15 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

None received.

16 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were **APPROVED** as a true record and signed by the Chair.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

18 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair had no announcements to make.

19 **AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The Committee **NOTED** the amendments to the constitution.

20 **DISCLOSURE BARRING SYSTEM (DBS) WORKING GROUP**

The Committee had before it, a report * from the Director of Legal, HR & Governance (Monitoring Officer) on the Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) for working group report.

The Director of Legal, HR & Governance (Monitoring Officer) outlined the content of the report with particular reference to the following:

- This was an update to Cabinet Members on the outcomes of the Standards Working Group who considered DBS checks for Members.
- The Working Group consisted of Cllrs Luke Taylor (Leader), James Buczkowski (Cabinet Member for Finance, Risk & Governance) and Andrea Glover (Chair of Standards Committee).
- The outcomes were in the report and the Safeguarding guidance notes and DBS checks was included.
- An update to the report on the financial implication were now £21.50 It had increased, therefore to carry out the DBS checks it would be via a third party provider with a total cost of £38.48.
- The cost for 42 members would be a total of £1616.16.

The following was discussed:

- There was a lot of discussion around the different parts and of the validity of conducting DBS checks and no actions taken from central government on Councillors to have a DBS Check.
- The most important part was trust from the electorate and for them to feel safe and secure when present with a Councillor.
- Within 2.6 of the report following consultation with the Head of Paid Service and Safeguarding Lead (where safeguarding issues), the Head of Paid Service would discuss the matter with the relevant member in consultation with Leader of the relevant Political Group and advice provided on any steps that should be taken. What about ungrouped members.
- Would the Chair of the Council not be a relevant person to consult with for those members that were ungrouped?
- The DBS to be transferable to other activities members were involved in.
- What would happen given that there was no legislation or government procedure, if the councillor just simply refused to submit the DBS or did not authorise it being shared with the group leader. What would happen?
- The code of conduct was based on legislation and/or government guidance, whereas the DBS was not.
- The Council should write to government to mandate enhanced DBS Checks.
- Would the DBS be published in the public domain and the risks this would have.

- The legislation stated 'you cannot stand for election' if you had been convicted of a crime within the past five years.
- What would the values be to the Council if Councillors had a DBS check?
- The DBS check would be a small part of the guidance and procedures in regards to safeguarding Councillors.
- This would be a safeguarding measure for the residents.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** the Standards Committee recommend to Full Council that:

- a) DBS checks are mandatory for all Members from May 2027 onwards;
- b) That any member can voluntarily have a DBS check from January 2025 until May 2027 when they become mandatory;
- c) The Head of Housing & Health is delegated to make any necessary changes to the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and related DBS policy in conjunction with the Cabinet member for Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health;
- d) This Council write to government to ask for enhanced DBS Checks for all Councillors in the future.

(Proposed by the Chair)

Note: * Report previously circulated.

Note: ** P Colthorpe voted against.

Note:*** N Woollatt Abstained from voting due to not being at the start of the debate.

21 **GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION - ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The Committee had before it, a report * from the Director of Legal, HR & Governance (Monitoring Officer) outlining the Government Consultation, enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at Council meeting.

The Director of Legal, HR & Governance (Monitoring Officer) outlined the content of the report with particular reference to the following:

- 'Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings', with the consultation closing on the 19 December 2024.
- This consultation seeks views on the detail and practical implications of allowing remote and hybrid attendance at local authority meetings.
- The possible introduction of proxy voting for those occasions when an elected member, due to personal circumstances, may be unable to attend even remotely. For example, during maternity, paternity or adoption leave.
- The Standards committee to debate and review ahead of the response being submitted after it would be presented to Full Council next week.

The following was discussed:

- The Motion 563 from the 19th of May 2020.
 - a) This Council resolved to hold all member briefings and working/advisory groups (where practicable) remotely in the future which would aid the

reduction of carbon emissions and provided significant savings on Members travel expenses.

b) This Council agreed to lobby central Government requesting that Regulation 5 of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 be extended past May 2021 and be formed into new legislation allowing Members to have the option to attend any meeting of the Council either in person or remotely.

- Members that were present when meetings were online and had the flexibility to keep their function as a Councillor.
- Measures that would be in place for those attending and distractions that may take place with meetings being held online.
- The option for hybrid meetings rather than just online, the engagement from members in a room.
- Full Council to remain in person only for Councillors to come together.
- Question 5 of the consultation and the figures that had been put forward.
- That remote attendance at meetings was generally welcomed across the committee.
- The Members of the Committee did not wish to see a return to fully remote meetings.
- The role of Chair should be in person for meetings.
- Further discussions would be required on how the Council might implement the changes.
- Setting rules around attendance of meeting online or if they were not to attend similar to the rules around sending substitutes to meeting.
- Physical presents of members, officers and Members of the public present.
- On occasions where a person was unwell, should they be attending meetings at all, even remotely?
- Remote meetings would be helpful in cases of inclement weather (flooding, snow etc) and would allow the meeting to still take place and that attendance and voting would be recognised.
- The Standards Committee expressed concerns over this particular proposal, with the governance of the proposal being of significant concern.
- A lack of clarity of how proxy voting would work when amendments were moved at a meeting, for example;
- Whether the use of proxy voting could be seen as predetermination.
- If the responses to the consultation from the discussion the evening be circulated to members of the Committee first before it goes to Full Council.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** the Standards Committee recommend to Full Council that:

1. That the Council **NOTED** the Government Consultation.
2. The Director of Legal, People & Governance (Monitoring Officer) be delegated to respond to the Government with the Councils response.

(Proposed by the Chair)

Note: * Report previously circulated.

22 COMPLAINTS

The Committee **NOTED** a verbal update from the Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) which provided an update on complaints received.

The following was highlighted:

- Since the last standards committee on the 19th of June, the Monitoring Officer had received two code of conduct complaints regarding 3 town and parish Councillors and 8 in total of code of conduct complaints regarding three district Councillors.

The following was discussed:

- The concerns on the benefit on the numbers of complaints.
- Were there any themes of reoccurrence or issues with certain Councils?
- To have a better understanding at the next meeting of those complaints upheld and this information not to be in the public domain.

23 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The Committee requested that the following be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- The Code of Conduct Complaints appeal procedures.
- Guide to making a complaint about a Councillor review.
- Protocol of good practice.
- The regular reporting of complaints to have further details, those upheld and if any common themes.
- To Review the Scheme of Delegation on Committees and Advisory Group including the terms of reference, but not the Policy Development Group.

(The meeting ended at 18.36)

CHAIR