

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE
Thursday, 12th March, 2020

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Clark, Cooksey, D. Cutts, Sheppard, Simpson, Vjestica, Mr. D. Bates, Mr. D. Rowley and Mr. R. Swann and also Mrs. M. Evers and Mrs. J. Porter.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors and Mrs. A. Bingham, Mr. P. Edler and Mrs. K. Penney.

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

68. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Whilst there were no members of the press or public present at the meeting; it was

Resolved:

That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for agenda item 6 (Concerns raised pursuant to the Whistleblowing Policy) and agenda item 7 (Consideration of Complaints) on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

69. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 30 JANUARY 2020

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the meeting of Standards and Ethics Committee held on 30 January 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

70. SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

Consideration was given to a report submitted by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, providing guidance around Members' engagement with social media.

The report cautioned Members against making any statements on social media in their capacity as councillors that could be found to be defamatory, untrue, or in other ways contrary to the Code of Conduct.

It was noted that the Council and the Standards and Ethics Committee had a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The information set out in the report re-iterated that Members should comply with the Code of Conduct when using Social Media, thereby contributing to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct.

Toward this end, Members were referred to further guidance as to the risks, benefits, and safe approaches to social media use in the Local Government Association's "Councillor's Guide to Handling Intimidation."

In discussion, it was suggested that this guidance be provided to all Members and included as part of induction training for New Members in future.

Members also discussed some possible ways the Standards and Ethics Committee might in future effectively hold Members to account in respect to upholding the Code of Conduct in their social media use. It was noted that upcoming legislation will inform the way we handle future suspected violations of the Code of Conduct with respect to social media use.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Monitoring Officer be requested to organise appropriate Social Media training for councillors as part of New Member Induction following the municipal elections.
3. That the Monitoring Officer issue guidance to Members on their use of Social Media via the Members Update, based on the content of this report.

71. CONCERNS RAISED PURSUANT TO THE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer which provided an overview of Whistleblowing cases received over the past year.

Particular reference was made to the appendix to the report which set out clearly the description of the concerns received and action taken.

Resolved:-

That the Whistleblowing concerns raised over the previous year and the actions taken to address these matters be noted.

72. CONSIDERATION OF COMPLAINTS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, detailing the progress with the handling of complaints relating to breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and Town and Parish Councillors. The report listed the current cases of complaint and the action being taken in respect of each one. Reference was made to each related case and recommended outcomes/actions identified were highlighted.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be received and the contents noted.
2. That the progress in respect of each case be noted pursuant to the Standards and Ethics Committee Complaints Procedure

73. URGENT BUSINESS

Consideration was given to the membership of the Committee, especially regarding upcoming reappointment of the independent, co-opted Members and reselection of Parish Councillors who serve on the Committee. It was noted that the membership of two of the Committee's independent Members had been extended through the end of the 2019-2020 municipal year.

Resolved:-

1. That the proposed renewal of the membership of the Committee's independent, co-opted Members and Parish Councillors be considered at the next meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee and recommended to Council for determination.

74. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**Resolved:-**

That the next meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee be held on Thursday 18 June 2020 in Rotherham Town Hall.