

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL OFFICES,  
GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY  
ON TUESDAY, 19TH FEBRUARY, 2019 AT 7.30 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors Mike Rice (Chairman), Councillor David Levett (Vice-Chairman), Julian Cunningham, Steve Deakin-Davies and Bernard Lovewell.*

*Parish Councillor Gary Hills*

*Nicholas Moss (Independent Person) - non-voting advisory role*

**14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio Recording – Start time of Item – 23 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Peter Chapman; Parish Councillor Lee Gregory and District Councillors Paul Clark, Terry Tyler and Judi Billing.

Councillor Ian Albert attended as the substitute Member for Councillor Judi Billing.

**15 MINUTES - 20 FEBRUARY 2018**

*Audio Recording – Start time of Item – 50 seconds*

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 February 2018 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

**16 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio Recording – Start time of Item – 1 minute and 30 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

**17 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio Recording – Start time of Item – 1 minute and 37 seconds*

The Chairman announced that:

- 1) In line with Council Policy, the meeting was being recorded;
- 2) In line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and Members were required to be notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item;

Members declaring a Declarable Interest, who wished to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote;

- 3) Reference was made to the cards specifically allocated to each individual member of the Committee in the base units of the audio equipment. The Committee was requested to not remove the cards from the units;
- 4) There was no public participation.

## 18 STANDARDS MATTERS AND RECOMMENDATION ON BEST PRACTICE CHANGES

*Audio Recording – Start time of Item – 3 minutes and 7 seconds*

The Service Director – Legal and Community/Monitoring Officer presented a report in respect of standards issues including the Government's response to the consultation on updating disqualification criteria for local authority members; and the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report on ethical standards, with recommendations on changes.

In response to the presentation, questions were raised by the following Members of the Committee:

- Councillor Cunningham
- Councillor Albert
- Councillor Levett
- Councillor Deakin-Davies
- Councillor Lovewell
- Mr Nicholas Moss

Having considered the best practice recommendations that the CPSL expected all local authorities to implement, the Committee agreed to proceed with the following:

Best Practice 6: The Council's Complaints Handling Procedure includes Standards Complaints assessment criteria. The Monitoring Officer would review this with the Chairman and Independent Persons, and make appropriate amendments to include a public interest test.

Best Practice 8: It was already the Council's best practice that an Independent Person was consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial. However, the Complaints Handling Procedure and the role would be amended following discussions with the Chairman and Independent Persons.

The Council had one formal investigation and hearing in recent years and the determination was published. The Committee agreed to not progress consideration of publishing the outcome of complaints investigated and not upheld at this given time.

Regarding the complaints/issues that had been considered since the last Committee meeting the Committee referred to an informal complaint by an employee of alleged comments, where the respective Councillor had denied such comments and had offered to speak to the individual. It was explained that often employees were reluctant to submit formal complaints against Councillors, as was the case in this instance. The Committee agreed that in future reports to the Committee would only include formal complaints.

Having fully discussed and considered the report it was

**Tuesday, 19th February, 2019**

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

- i. notes the Government's response to the disqualification criteria recommendations;
- ii. notes the content of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report and recommendations; and
- iii. instructs the Monitoring Officer to review best practice recommendations with the Chairman and Independent Persons with a view to making appropriate changes in line with the CSPL's best practice recommendations (6 and 8).

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure good governance within the Council.

Chairman