

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON WEDNESDAY, 1ST NOVEMBER, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Ruth Brown (Chair), Ian Albert (Vice-Chair), Val Bryant, Dominic Griffiths, Ralph Muncer, Sean Prendergast, Amy Allen, Faye Frost and David Levett.*

Parish Councillor Martin Griffin.

Nicholas Moss OBE (Independent Person) non-voting advisory role,

Peter Chapman and John Richardson (Reserve Independent Person), non-voting advisory roles.

In Attendance:

Isabelle Alajooz (Legal Commercial Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).

Also Present:

There were no members of the public present.

35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 23 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alistair Willoughby, Gerald Morris, Raj Bhakar, Cathy Brownjohn, Juan Cowell and Richard Thake.

Having given due notice Councillor David Levett substituted for Councillor Thake, Councillor Faye Frost substituted for Councillor Morris and Councillor Amy Allen substituted for Councillor Willoughby.

Councillor Clare Billing was absent.

36 MINUTES - 22 MARCH 2023

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 8 seconds

Councillor Ruth Brown, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 March 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

37 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 49 seconds

There was no other business notified.

38 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 52 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy this meeting would be audio recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) The Chair advised for the purpose of clarification Clause 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution does not apply to this meeting.

39 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 39 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

40 STANDARDS MATTERS REPORT

Audio recording – 3 minutes 43 seconds

The Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled 'Standards Matters' and highlighted that:

- There had been ten complaints received so far this year, two of these complaints were open and the remaining eight had been completed.
- There was a link at 8.2 of the report to review previously completed complaints.
- The complaint handling procedure was reviewed at the March 23 meeting, no changes were currently being proposed.
- The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had launched a consultation of the Code of Practice under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and a link to this consultation was at 8.4 of the report. The results of the consultation if relevant would be brought to the Committee in 2024.
- Virtual Code of Conduct training was provided to new District Councillors and extended to Parish Councillors, with training slides distributed.
- The training for May 2024 was being reviewed with the aim to make it more interactive and accessible.
- A review was scheduled for section 8 of the Constitution and the Planning Code of Good Conduct, however the Lawyers in Local Government were currently reviewing this matter to initiate a national model. When this matter had been revised the proposal would be considered by the Committee for adoption at Full Council.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

In response to questions the Monitoring Officer stated that:

Wednesday, 1st November, 2023

- If a Councillor had already undertaken safeguarding training and had a valid certificate, this could be submitted as evidence and considered for the safeguarding audit.
- Hertfordshire County Council had different parameters for their Code of Conduct, and all North Hertfordshire District Councillors were required to complete the NHDC Code of Conduct training which followed the LGA model.
- After the election in May 2024 there would be various training modules for Councillors to complete. Work was ongoing to schedule these and make them more interactive.
- If mandatory training was not completed a Councillor would initially be contacted by the Monitoring Officer, or their PA, to resolve the issue. Ultimately, failure to comply with mandatory training was a Code of Conduct breach and therefore, if it could not be resolved, action could be taken. However, this had not been required in recent years.

Councillor Ruth Brown, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the contents of the report and made suggestions on future actions.

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

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Chair