

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON TUESDAY, 20TH OCTOBER, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Judi Billing MBE (Chair), Ruth Brown (Vice-Chair), Kate Aspinwall, Clare Billing, David Levett, Gerald Morris, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Martin Stears-Handscomb and Claire Strong.*

Town/Parish/Community Councillors: Parish Councillor Rebecca Elliott and Parish Councillor Martin Griffin

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

In Attendance: *Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio recording – 4 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to the virtual Standards Committee meeting that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call and gave advice regarding the following:

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel and also recorded via Zoom. If live streaming failed the meeting would adjourn. If the live stream could not be restored within a reasonable period then the remaining business would be considered at later date.

Members were requested to stay in view of the camera at all times

If for any reason the meeting was not quorate an Officer would notify attendees. The meeting would adjourn immediately. Once the meeting was quorate the meeting would resume. If connection could not be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

Only Members present for the entire debate and consideration of an item were entitled to vote. If a remote Member lost connection the Chair may adjourn the meeting for a short period to enable connection to be re-established. If the Chair did not adjourn the meeting the Member would be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment.

That mobile phones and other noise emitting devices are muted.

That the mute button on the tablets and computers be muted when not speaking.

Members wishing to speak should use the raise hand button and unmute their microphone before speaking.

Voting would be via the Green tick for “Yes”, Red Cross for “No” and Blue Raise Hand for “abstain” functions.

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, started the meeting proper.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 3 minutes 56 seconds

Parish Councillor Martin Griffin apologised that he would be leaving the meeting at 8pm.

Former Parish Councillor Julia Magill had apologised that she could no longer attend the Standards Committee as she was no longer qualified to do so as she was no longer a Parish Councillor.

RESOLVED: That it be placed on record that the Standards Committee thank former Parish Councillor Julia Magill for her service to the Committee.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 40 seconds

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 47 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed Parish Councillor Martin Griffin, Parish Councillor Rebecca Elliott and Reserve Independent Person John Richardson, who were all new to the NHDC Standards Committee;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy, this meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available to view on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC Youtube channel;
- (3) Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 6 minutes 4 seconds

There were no presentations by members of the public.

6 STANDARDS MATTERS

Audio recording – 6 minutes 16 seconds

The Service Director Legal and Community and Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled Standards Matters and drew attention to the following:

Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) - Local Government Ethical Standards

- Paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 outlined the background and the current position in respect of the Model Code of Conduct.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor David Levett.

Ongoing Review / Consultation by CSPL on Electoral Regulation and Standards Matter 2 landscape review of institutions

- Paragraphs 8.3 and 8.4 of the report detailed the current position.

North Hertfordshire Complaints/ Issues Update

- Paragraphs 8.5 and 8.6 outlined 6 complaints received against District Councillors and that there were ongoing issues at Great Ashby Community Council.

The following Member asked a question:

- Councillor Sean Prendergast.

In response to the question the Monitoring Officer advised that under usual circumstances the identity of those having a complaint made against them was confidential, however in respect of complaint 1/2020 they had given consent to their identity being disclosed and this was Councillor Sam North.

Member Training

- Training usually took place following an election.
- The election in 2020 was postponed due to Covid-19 as was the associated training.
- The next round of training would take place following the election in 2021
- Members were asked to comment on additional training required such as Use of Social Media.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Mike Rice;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor Clare Billing;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Parish Councillor Rebecca Elliott;
- Reserve Independent Person Peter Chapman.

Comment from Members included:

- That the Cabinet Panel on Community Engagement and Cooperative Development would be discussing social media and had invited administrators of social media sites to join the meeting in November.
- Information sessions could be provided for Members as well as training sessions.
- Social Media information included in the Code of Conduct was quite old a needed to be reviewed;
- That the expectation from members of social media groups is that Councillors and/or the Council will respond to posts on each and every group;
- That the Committee should wait for the Model Code of Conduct to be published.

Recruitment of further Reserve Independent Person and co-option of further Parish Council representatives to Standards Committee

- Parish Councillors Rebecca Elliott and Martin Griffin had been co-opted onto the Standards Committee;
- John Richardson had been appointed as Reserve Independent Person.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report entitled Standards Matters be noted;
- (2) That the Learning and Development Champions be requested to consider ways to encourage Member uptake of training opportunities;
- (3) That all Members continue to be offered the offered the opportunity to attend the training sessions provided as part of the Member Induction Programme.

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

The meeting closed at 8.13 pm

Chair