

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### STANDARDS COMMITTEE

#### MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, 3RD MARCH, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

#### MINUTES

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

*Parish Councillor Martin Griffin*

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

**In Attendance:** *Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Isabelle Alajooz (Legal Commercial Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Nurainatta Katevu (Legal Regulatory Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

#### 7 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

*Audio recording – 23 seconds*

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of Cabinet 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 drew attention to the Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol Summary which gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Rules of Debate; and
- Voting.

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

#### 8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 48 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sam Collins.

**9 MINUTES - 22 OCTOBER 2019 TO 20 OCTOBER 2020**

*Audio Recording – 3 minutes 7 seconds*

Councillor Judi Billing proposed, Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and it was

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 22 October 2019 and 20 October 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.
- (2) That, with the authorisation of the Chair, her electronic signature and initials be attached to the Minutes approved in (1) above.

**10 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 22 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

**11 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 5 minutes 32 seconds*

- (1) 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.
- (2) 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.

**12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 6 seconds*

There were no presentations by members of the public.

**13 STANDARDS MATTERS REPORT**

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 14 seconds*

The Service Director – Legal and Community/Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled Standards Matters.

She advised that, in respect of Paragraph 8.5 of the report, further complaints had been received since publication of the report.

Councillor Clare Billing proposed, Councillor Richard Thake seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the report entitled Standards Matters be noted.

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

## 14 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION ('LGA') MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

*Audio recording – 9 minutes 28 seconds*

The Service Director – Legal and Community/Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct together with the following appendices:

- Appendix 1 – LGA model code 19 January 2021;
- Appendix 2 – suggested replacement Appendix B Table 1, which includes the NHDC definition of DPIs and links to guidance/ statutory instrument (and some typographical changes);
- Appendix 3 – suggested replacement Appendix C, which includes the NHDC Appendix C on Dispensations.

She advised that:

- This was not a perfect Code, but on balance as a package with LGA guidance and support it should be considered, but it was for this Committee to consider whether to recommend adoption to Council;
- The Model Code had received a mixed reaction across the Country, which was for a variety of reasons: from style of code/ what it covered/ elections about to take place to the fact that there were no effective sanctions – so why bother;
- Locally, however, there had been in-principle support for local councils to adopt (24 of the 27 in the District had indicated they were interested in taking this forward)
- If the Model Code was not adopted, the current NHDC Code and guidance would require review with associated resources;

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Independent Person Nicholas Moss;
- Councillor Clare Billing;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Parish Councillor Martin Griffin;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;
- Reserve Independent Person John Richardson;
- Reserve Independent Person Peter Chapman.

In response to questions the Service Director Legal and Community/Monitoring Officer advised:

- That if the Model Code were adopted and it was reviewed by the LGA, a report would be brought to this Committee to consider (and whether to recommend adopting the revised version);
- Any amendments to the current version would need to be considered and adopted by Council;

- If the best practice list was included, Member could not be held accountable for anything in this list and it did not particularly add to that Code;
- It was suggested that Appendix B of the Code - Table 1 be replaced with Appendix B and Appendix C of the Code – List of Best Practices be replaced with Appendix C;
- If training is deemed as mandatory then options and methods of training would be considered – although a pragmatic and proactive approach would be undertaken by officers.

Members considered that the best practice list and new Appendix C should be included with the Model Code.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:**

- (1) That the LGA Model Code of Conduct be adopted with the following amendments:
  - (i) Appendix B to include the replacement Table 1, which includes the NHDC definition of DPIs and links to guidance/ statutory instrument
  - (ii) Replacement of the Appendix C good practice recommendations with Appendix C grounds for a Dispensation
  - (iii) Definition of 'room' to include a footnote explanation that this includes 'virtual meeting' room and typographical changes to use the words: 'Registrable' and 'behaviours';
- (2) That the Code take effect from the day after the election poll in 2021 (7 May) or such day if the election is postponed, as the case may be;
- (3) That training on the new code be compulsory for all District Councillors during the 2021-2022 municipal year.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To ensure good governance within the Council, which is reflective of a national governance model.

The meeting closed at 8.22 pm

Chair