



Democracy and Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at The Holding Room, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Thursday 15 June 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Daniel Cribbin
Councillor Jonathan Harris
Councillor Nigel Hinch
Councillor Andrew Kilbride
Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Cathrine Russell

Officers:

Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Paul Hanson - Head of Democratic and Elections
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Marina Watkins, Committee Officer

80. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

81. **Minutes**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised that there was a need for the Committee to resolve to allow members who called in a planning application to attend the meeting remotely. This would allow the resolution to be included in the report to Council.

With regards to members calling-in planning applications, it was clarified that the Constitution had been changed some time ago to allow the application to be considered even if the member who called it in was not present. This was so that members of the public in attendance at the meeting were not inconvenienced. The Director of Legal and Democratic advised that once the agenda had been published with the application on it, it cannot be changed. The political groups were asked to ensure that any member calling-in an item should always submit a written representation in case they could not attend the meeting, or the remote connection failed.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 19th April 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.
- ii) That the Constitution be amended to allow members who have called-in a planning application to attend the meeting remotely. They would not be permitted to vote in such circumstances.

82. Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Councillors Wendy Randall, Cathrine Russell and Nigel Hinch to the Committee.

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for the 21st would be moved to take place on the Tuesday 12th September to allow any reports to be submitted to the Council meeting at the end of the month.

83. Review of Member Complaints Procedure

The Director Legal and Democratic presented the report. Following the first sub-committee hearing it was apparent that the complaints process required review and clarity. The Committee was asked to suggest improvements and recommendations which would be included in a full review to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Following a discussion, the following points were made:

- Members needed clarification of the process
- It needed to be highlighted that members could take a friend or colleague to the Hearing as support
- The expectations of the Investigating Officer needed to be clear
- Standards letters were important for clarity
- The Deputy Democratic Services Manager should be provided with a presentation in order to explain the process clearly to members
- The Independent Person decides how to conduct an investigation and who to call as witnesses. They required enough information to draw a conclusion
- The LGA (local Government Association) could provide support for members
- Consideration should be taken regarding purdah. An investigation would not generally be arranged during purdah as it could possibly be prejudicial.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Considered the issues highlighted by the report and discussed improvements as detailed above
- b) Agreed to receive a revised draft of the procedure at the next meeting

84. Proposed amendments to the Constitution

The Head of Democratic and Elections outlined the report, which detailed proposed changes to the section on 'authority to consult', requiring the Cabinet member to be consulted prior to certain public consultations taking place.

Changes would be made to the Planning Protocol in order to capture the changes regarding remote participation at planning committees.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted and approved the updates to the Constitution as set out in Section 5, and
- b) recommends the updates to Council for approval

85. Register of Members' Interests

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager outlined the report and reminded members of the process and importance of members ensuring that their interest forms were up to date. The Groups could raise the issue and encourage members to check that their interests were updated whenever there was a change.

In response to questions, the Director of Legal and Democratic advised that a case could be put to her requesting the non-disclosure of a partner's interests if there was good reason to do so.

The Director of Legal and Democratic advised that she would be happy to attend any group meetings to raise awareness. The responsibility for ensuring that interest forms were completed and up to date lay with the individual.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted that the process is followed for the operation of the Register of members Interests

86. Councillor Development Programme 2023 -2025 - Progress report

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager outlined the report. Councillor development was mostly focused on planning and scrutiny training during the current year. Cabinet had asked the Centre for Public Scrutiny to provide a suite of training which would take place over the coming months.

The LGA would be contacted with a view to providing training on chairing meetings and questioning technique.

The Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee requested that training on audit was included in the programme, particularly with regards to the distinction between the role of audit and of scrutiny. The Director of Legal and Democratic undertook to discuss the matter with the Executive Director of Finance to assess what audit training would be beneficial for members.

Standards training for members would also be considered. Members were reminded that the members training section on Teams contained all past training sessions and presentations.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted the further progress undertaken on developing a Councillor Training Programme for 2023/24
- b) Considers other potential opportunities to deliver and promote learning and development opportunities for Councillors

87. Annual Report of the Democracy and Standards Committee 2022/2023

The Chair presented the Annual report which detailed the work of the Committee during 2022/23. The report would be submitted to the Council meeting in September.

RESOLVED:

The Annual report of the Democracy and Standards Committee be noted

88. Review of Committee Work Programme

Consideration was given to the Democracy and Standards Committee 2023-24 Work Programme.

The proposed changes to the hearing procedure would be included on the agenda for the September meeting.

It was noted that the Community Governance Review would fall under the remit of the Committee. It would commence in the Autumn and would take approximately one year to complete.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

89. Urgent Business

None advised.

The meeting closed at 7.07 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____