



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Democracy and Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at The Jeffery Room, The Guildhall, Northampton on Thursday 28 July 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present	Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair) Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair) Councillor Danielle Stone Councillor Jonathan Harris Councillor Andrew Kilbride Councillor Stephen Hibbert Councillor Nigel Hinch
Substitute Members:	Councillor Nigel Hinch (for Councillor Daniel Cribbin) Councillor Stephen Hibbert (for Councillor Laura Stevenson)
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Mike Warren Councillor Daniel Cribbin Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift Councillor Laura Stevenson
Officers	Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer) - attended remotely Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager Marina Watkins, Committee Officer

40. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

41. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 16th June 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

42. **Statistics - code of Conduct Arrangements - Six monthly update**

Consideration was given to the report on Statistic – Code of Conduct Arrangements – Six monthly update.

In response to a question regarding the need to declare an interest in membership of a masonic lodge the Monitoring Officer advised that it was members responsibility to declare any interests. There were no special rules for members of for example, the

freemasons. Should a complaint be submitted to Committee, an investigation report can be provided should after the initial assessment it is felt there is a need for an investigation to take place which would be provided detailing how the case would be presented with any necessary advice provided.

At the moment, no specific information was kept regarding the details of complainants with regards to race, gender etc.

In response to question regarding complaints against Parish Councillors, the Monitoring Officer advised that the powers available to the Council were the same as those available against West Northants Councillors. Training and censor was available, although Councillors could not be forced to cooperate. However it was within the Councils gift to draw the public's attention to any outcomes.

It was agreed that in the future, the report would separate out Town Council and Parish Council complaints.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted the statistics in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Member Conduct.
- b) Noted the process that is followed in dealing with complaints received in respect of the Code of Member Conduct.

43. Member Development

Consideration was given to the report regarding member development.

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager advised that the appendix detailed both training sessions and briefings, although attendance figures were not recorded for the briefing sessions. The briefings would be separated out in future to avoid confusion. Members were reminded that recordings of the training and presentations were available in the members Teams channel.

The Monitoring Officer advised that two Code of Conduct training session had been held, but there were still 22 members who had not attended either session. A further session would be arranged with those members specifically invited to attend. The Chair requested that Group Leaders be informed which Councillors within their Group have still to complete a Code of Conduct course.

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager would work with the Monitoring Officer to produce a feedback form for completion after training sessions. Members would need

to ensure the forms were completed in order to obtain any benefit from the views offered.

It was suggested that training should be offered on the differences between net zero and carbon neutral, Equalities and the Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer agreed to include a section on the relationship between Councillors and Officers in the Code of Conduct training.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted the Councillor Development programme to date and identified that additional training was required in the following areas - the differences between net zero and carbon neutral, Equalities and the Code of Conduct.
- b) Noted the induction programme.
- c) Requested that a feedback form be produced for completion by members following training sessions.

44. Register of Members' Interests

Consideration was given to the report regarding the Register of Members' Interests.

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager advised that an update to one Councillor's register of interest form was still outstanding.

Following a question, the Monitoring Officer advised that one single central interests form for all organisations could not be used as they all had different requirements. The West Northants Council form was based on its Code of Conduct, which is often different from that adopted by Parish Councils.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the process that is followed for the operation of the Register of Members' Interests.

45. Boundary Review - verbal update

The Monitoring Officer advised that the draft Boundary Review submission had been submitted to the Boundary Commission, who were surprised that a range of possible member numbers had been suggested, as opposed to one figure. The Local

Government Boundary Commission were due to report back to the Council at the end of August.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the verbal update

46. **Proposed amendments to the Constitution**

Consideration was given to the report detailing proposed amendments to the Constitution.

The Monitoring Officer noted that the Democracy and Standards Committee had agreed to change 'Priority Opposition Motions' to 'Priority Opposition Business' with no vote required. However, at the Council meeting, there was no agreement and the matter was referred back to Democracy and Standards Committee for further review.

It was considered that the item could not be referred to as a 'Motion' if there was no vote. However, the Labour Group preferred the item to remain as a Motion and were keen that it was for the main opposition group only.

It was noted that at the moment, Motions were listed on the Council agenda on a first come, first served basis. It was suggested that were the Liberal Democrats not able to make use of the 'Priority Opposition Business' item, then they should be permitted to have their Motion listed and discussed first at the meeting.

The Committee agreed to:

Priority Opposition Business with no vote

The Liberal Democrats have one Motion listed and discussed first on one occasion during the Council year

Councillor Jonathan Harris wished it to be noted that he was not in agreement with the views proposed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee proposed the following changes to the Constitution to be considered by the Council at its meeting on 29 September 2022:

- a) Priority Opposition Business with no vote
- b) That the Liberal Democrats have one Motion listed and discussed first on one occasion during the Council year

47. **Carried Motions on Notice - Predecessor Councils**

Consideration was given to the report regarding Carried Motions from Predecessor Councils.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the issue with regards to carried Motions from the predecessor Councils needed to be resolved. Councillors could put them forward again for agreement if needed. The past Motions could not be agreed collectively as the new Authority needed to consider the matters separately to ensure lawful decision making.

Councillors were keen that many years of work that had been invested into some of the issues covered by the old Motions should not be lost.

It was pointed out that there were a limited number of opportunities for submitting Motions to Council.

It was agreed that opposition groups would review the past Motions in order to highlight those that were still relevant. Reasons for approving each Motion should then be collated and reconsidered at the January meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee, before submission to Council. The Deputy Democratic Services Manager undertook to circulate the list of Carried Motions for groups to review.

RESOLVED:

That a review is carried out on the Carried Motions from Predecessor Councils, with reasons provided for those deemed appropriate for re-adoption by the Opposition Groups. The details to be considered at the January meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee before consideration at Council.

48. **Review of Committee Work Programme**

Consideration was given to the Committee Work Programme. It was noted that the next phase of the Boundary Review should be included in the programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

49. **Urgent Business**

None advised.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____