



Democracy and Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at The Guildhall, St Giles Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Thursday 25 January 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Andrew Kilbride (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

Also in attendance: Councillor Sally Beardsworth

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Cathrine Russell

Officers:

Cath Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic
Sarah Hall, Deputy Director Law and Governance
Paul Hanson - Head of Democratic and Elections
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Marina Watkins, Committee Officer
Adrian Ward, Chief Internal Auditor (remote)

109. Appointment of Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Nigel Hinch that Councillor Andrew Kilbride be appointed Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift. On being put to the Committee it was

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Andrew Kilbride be appointed Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee.

110. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift declared that as Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee she had an interest in item 11 regarding appointing co-opted members to the Committee.

111. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 15th November 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

112. **Chair's Announcements**

None advised.

113. **Statistics - Code of Conduct Arrangements Annual Review**

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager outlined the report which provided detailed statistics in relation to the Member Code of Conduct complaints dealt with under the Member Complaints Procedure.

In response to a question regarding the number of complaints regarding parish councils, the Monitoring Officer advised that complaints were assessed at an early stage to decide whether it was in the public interest to warrant the required work. There were a very large number of parish councils in the West Northants area so the number of complaints put in was not unexpected. Danny Moody of NCALC provided training with regards to bullying and respectful behaviour when necessary.

The Deputy Director Law and Governance added that training had been provided for certain parish councils where a large number of complaints had been received, and such action had seen complaints reduce. A pragmatic approach was adopted and lots of unsubstantiated complaints were not progressed with after initial assessment. The number of complaints against parish councils was relatively small in comparison to the number of parish councils.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

notes the statistics in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the WNC Members' Code of Conduct and of Codes of Conduct adopted by Town and Parish councils within West Northamptonshire.

114. **Councillor Development Programme 2023 -2025 - Progress report**

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager outlined the report, which detailed the progress on Councillor development.

Training had most recently concentrated on planning and overview and scrutiny. The views provided by Councillors regarding the external training provision had been somewhat negative.

Councillor Harris suggested that training on the Local Plan, Local transport Plan, Carbon literacy and Net Zero would be useful.

It was considered that all training whether externally or internally held can vary in quality.

In response to questions, the Monitoring Officer advised that consideration could be given to claiming money back from external providers if the training did not meet the required standards.

Councillor Harris suggested that a working group could be set up to shape the training and provide some direction. The Monitoring Officer advised that it was frustrating that some councillors would attend mandatory training for only 10 minutes – 30 minutes, and perhaps a working group could provide some judgement on such matters. Councillor Hinch suggested that there should be some short form of assessment at the end of mandatory sessions.

The Committee agreed that a working group should be set up to provide direction with regards to member training the members to be Councillors Jonathan Harris, Andrew Kilbride and Wendy Randall.

Standards Hearing training would be arranged for the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes the Training Programme for 2023/24 and takes into consideration feedback received regarding the delivery and training providers of key Councillor Development sessions.
- b) Approves the delivery of future Councillor Development sessions by internal Officers, different external training providers or a mix of both.
- c) Considers other potential opportunities to deliver and promote learning and development opportunities for Councillors.
- d) Confirms that training for all Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee on the process for Hearing sub-Committees is scheduled and delivered by the Monitoring Officer.
- e) that a working group should be set up to provide direction with regards to member training as and when needed, with the members to be Councillors Jonathan Harris, Andrew Kilbride and Wendy Randall.

115. West Northamptonshire Community Governance Review: Update

The Head of Democratic and Elections outlined the report which provided an update on the Community Governance Review which was currently in stage 1 consultation. The consultation will end on 31st January, with recommendations on proposed

changes being compiled before being submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 11th March. Recommendations would be split into 3 types:

- 1) proposed changes not possible
- 2) changes supported by consultation and deliverable and
- 3) judgement of the Committee is required.

The Council needed to take ownership of any proposals. Regard had to be paid to protected arrangements, where the Boundary Commission had put changes in within the last 5 years. The second stage of consultation would commence on 26th April. The Monitoring Officer advised that clear decisions would be required from the Democracy and Standards Committee on 11th March, as the timescales were very tight.

Councillor Irving-Swift wished it to be noted that she had attended the training on CGR on 20th December and found it to be very useful and clear.

In response to questions from Councillor Randall, the Head of Democratic and Elections advised that WNC could not unilaterally move wards and the Boundary Commission set the bar high for any requested changes in the first five years. Discussion would be held with Councillor Randall regarding Daventry Town Councils views outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee notes the update on the Community Governance Review of parishes in West Northamptonshire and endorses the proposed decision making process to be followed at the conclusion of the first stage of the formal consultation.

116. Updates to the Constitution

The Head of Democratic and Elections outlined the report which outlined minor changes to the Constitution to reflect consistency.

It was considered that the need to remain silent when councillors were speaking should apply to members of the public too. Such a requirement could be added to section relating to disorderly conduct. The issue would be brought back to a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee notes and approves the recommendations to Council relating to updates to the Constitution as set out in Section 5 of the report.

117. Appointment of Independent Persons

The Deputy Director Law and Governance outlined the report, which proposed the re-appointment of Independent Persons (IPs) to assist in the consideration of Member

Code of Conduct complaints. The IPs dealt with around 40 complaints a year and were rotated to ensure a fair workload. The 2 x 4 year terms of office for co-opted members was in line with that recommended by CIPFA.

The Committee considered that there should be a wider mix of IPs as it was noted that all four of the current role holders were male. For continuity and retention of experience it was suggested that the current IPs be re-appointed, with a role review and recruitment exercise carried out in the future to try to engage a wider variety of applicants.

The Committee considered that it may be beneficial to stagger the end times of the IPs, with 2 continuing in post for 2 further years and 2 for 4 years. This would allow retention of experience but also a rotation in personnel.

It was considered that the allowance be reviewed by the Independent Remuneration panel when it next meets.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee recommends to Council the re-appointment of the following Independent Persons for West Northamptonshire Council, with 2 being appointed for a period of 2 years and 2 being appointed for a period of 4 years

Peter Glover
Alan Hayes
John Peachey
Tom Edwards

118. **Appointment of non-elected Co-opted Members of the Audit and Governance Committee**

The Deputy Director Law and Governance outlined the report, which proposed amendments to the constitution to add Co-opted Members to the Audit and Governance Committee in accordance with CIPFA recommendations.

Adrian Ward, the Chief Internal Auditor joined the meeting remotely for this item. The Co-opted Members would have no voting rights but would be suitably experienced in the area of audit and governance. Councillor Irving-Swift, the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, advised that the Committee were in agreement with the proposal, and that the Executive Director of Finance and Chief Internal Auditor supported the plans.

In response to a question regarding broadcasting meetings of the Audit and Governance Committee, the Monitoring Officer advised that she was reluctant to roll out webcasting to additional meetings until on-going technical problems were resolved.

The new Co-opted roles would receive an allowance, which was not yet included in the Allowances Scheme. The Independent Remuneration panel would be contacted, and approval requested for the Co-optees to receive the same allowance for other

similar positions which was currently £500pa. A full review of the Allowances Scheme would be taking place next year.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the outcome of the consultation with the Members of the Audit and Governance Committee, the Democracy and Standards Committee recommend to Council:

i) Amendments to the Constitution to add two Co-opted Independent Members to the Membership of the Audit and Governance Committee with payment of an allowance matching those of the other Co-opted Independent Members of the Council of £500 per annum; and

ii) To delegate to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee and the Head of Audit and Risk Management the arrangements for the selection of such members. This would include the preparation of a role profile, advertising the roles and convening a selection panel of Members supported by Officers to interview applicants, following which formal appointment would be referred back to Council.

119. **Committee Work Programme 2024/2025**

Consideration was given to the Democracy and Standards Committee Work Programme 2024-25. A revised draft was circulated at the meeting.

Councillor Harris suggested an item be added to the work programme regarding a protocol on the use of Council footage for meetings. The Monitoring Officer advised that such a policy already existed. The law stated that individuals could record meetings. The most pragmatic outcome was the Council producing a public record of the meeting via YouTube. The policy could be shared and reviewed. The Head of Democratic and Elections advised that this was part of a wider issue, where councillors or any member of the public could make use of footage and it was very difficult to police.

A point was raised regarding public consultations. The Monitoring Officer advised that public consultation was often quite regimented in how it was laid out, but should Councillors have an issue with a particular piece of consultation, she would look into the matter if requested.

Councillor Haris queried why there were no Minutes of the Highways Oversight Group. The Monitoring Officer advised that the group was not a Task and Finish Group but an informal group set up by Cabinet and Place Scrutiny members.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

120. **Urgent Business**

None advised.

The meeting closed at 7.26 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____