



**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 27 January 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present	Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair) Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair) Councillor Daniel Cribbin Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift Councillor Laura Stevenson
Apologies for	Councillor Fiona Cole Councillor Gareth Eales
Absence:	Councillor Jonathan Harris Councillor Andrew Kilbride
Officers	Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer) Sameera Khan, Head of Legal & Information Governance (to commence duties 1 February 2022) Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager Marina Watkins, Committee Officer

21. Minutes

It was noted that the words 'be noted' should be added to the end of the 4th paragraph on page 6 of the Minutes.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the amendment above, the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 23rd November 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

22. Declarations of Interest

None advised.

23. Chair's Announcements

The Chairman welcomed Sameera Khan to the meetings, who would be joining the Council shortly as Head of Legal & Information Governance.

With regards to the Boundary Review Task Panel, it was noted that the meetings could be held remotely or face-to-face. It was suggested that the meetings could be held remotely, with the final meeting being held in person.

24. **Member Development**

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager outlined the report. Members' development sessions had been well attended. The sessions had been recorded, along with the presentations and were available on iLearn in the Members section.

The Committee were asked whether they considered that on-going and refresher training for members of the Planning and Licensing Committees should be mandatory.

Planned training sessions included Chairing skills, Chairing skills for Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Equalities.

Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift considered that training on audit should be included in the programme.

Councillors Daniel Cribbin was of the opinion that training should be mandatory for members sitting on regulatory committees.

The Director of Legal and Democratic advised that all that if members would like the training to be mandatory members would be invited to attend the specific sessions. One to one training could be offered if a councillor could not attend a group session. Councillors could be named if there was continued non-compliance with training. Training could be made mandatory on a range of topics for example the code of conduct and standards hearings.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes the training that has been provided to date and agrees that further training should be provided in relation to specific areas including additional planning, scrutiny and if necessary audit and Standards.
- b) approved that refresher and ongoing training for members of the Planning and Licensing Committees should be mandatory

25. **Ethics and Standards - Statistics - Code of Conduct Arrangements**

Consideration was given to the report providing the six monthly update on the number of complaints received and dealt with in respect of the Code of Conduct.

In response to a question, the Director of Legal and Democratic advised that the Council did not have powers to investigate complaints against the old sovereign councils.

Information was requested regarding benchmark data so that cases could be compared with other Local Authorities. The Director of Legal and Democratic advised

that not all Councils had Standards Committees, but data could be researched. Complaints were often dictated by what was going on within a Council, e.g. a controversial planning application could drive up the numbers of complaints. There was no timescale for complaints to be submitted but it was pointed out that older complaints would not necessarily be in the public interest to investigate. Following a request, it was suggested that the figures for the annual report could be broken down to identify the subject areas of complaints.

The Vice-Chair commended the complaints process that had been put in place. The Director of Legal and Democratic offered to pass the Committees' praise on to Geoff Wild, along with the Chair's thanks for work on the Constitution.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

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

26. **Work Programme of the Democracy and Standards Committee**

Consideration was given to the suggested work programme, which was draft and could be changed by the Committee as required.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes the completion of the tasks set by the Committee between May and December of its first year.
- b) Considers and approves the proposed work programme for 2022/3.

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____