

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 06 October 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Baron – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr M Andrews, Cllr D Borthwick, Cllr N Brooks, Cllr A Jones,
Cllr C Rigby and Cllr A M Sibley.

Also in attendance: Mr P Cashmore, Mr I Sibley and Mr J Storey (Independent Persons).

18. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

The meeting commenced with a Minute's Silence in memory of the late Councillor Colin Bungey, former Chairman of the Standards Committee.

19. Substitute Members

There were no substitutes.

20. Election of Chairman

It was proposed by Councillor C Rigby, seconded by Councillor N Brooks and

RESOLVED that Councillor S Baron be elected as Chairman of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

21. Election of Vice-Chairman

It was proposed by Councillor A Sibley, seconded by Councillor D Borthwick that Councillor A Jones be elected as Vice-Chairman.

It was proposed by Councillor M Andrews, seconded by Councillor C Rigby that Councillor N Brooks be elected as Vice-Chairman.

Following a secret ballot it was

RESOLVED that Councillor N Brooks be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

22. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

23. Public Issues

There were no public issues.

24. Confirmation of Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting on 14 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

25. Code of Conduct Complaints - Review

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided Members with an update on complaints of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct by Councillors received or concluded since 1 January 2020. A similar report had been presented to the Committee in January 2020 for the period from 1 April 2019 and a report in this format would now be included as a standard item at all future meetings. The Committee noted the impact of the coronavirus pandemic upon the provision of training and refresher sessions for Councillors on Code of Conduct matters. Notwithstanding this, the Committee underlined its commitment to provision of quality training delivered to Councillors through the virtual, on-line format and the Council's on-line facility now included a suite of training aimed at Councillors. Members also emphasised the importance of effectively targeting the training towards where it was most needed and, in parallel, ensuring it was appropriate for the needs of elected members. It was agreed that a meeting between the training providers and a small group of Councillors from the Standards Committee would be beneficial and could potentially positively influence the style and content of training.

The challenge of ensuring as high as possible engagement was recognised. The emphasis remained upon individuals but there were opportunities identified for Group Leaders to have a role in promoting attendance and monitoring take-up.

Once again, the Committee underlined its view about the importance of training in Code of Conduct issues and strongly recommended participation by all Councillors.

The Committee was advised about the work being undertaken by the Local Government Association on production of a new Code of Conduct and the introduction of the new Code would be a further opportunity for targeted training.

RESOLVED that

(a) the outcome of concluded complaints and the progress of those still outstanding be noted; and

(b) a small group of Councillors comprising the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee and Councillor A Jones meet with the training provider to discuss style and content of future training events.

Voting: Unanimous.

26. Consideration of Report in Respect of Complaint about a Councillor

The Interim Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided the Standards Committee with the conclusions of the independent investigation following complaints made about Councillor Beverley Dunlop. The investigator's full report had been attached at Appendix 1 and the conclusion of the investigator was that Councillor Dunlop did not breach the Code of Conduct because she was not acting in the capacity of a councillor when posting to the Facebook group which resulted in the complaint.

The Committee noted the length of time taken to bring forward a recommendation to the Committee and there was acceptance of the need to deal more expeditiously with these complaints going forward.

Although there was acceptance of the current situation as set out, there was a view expressed that comments of the type complained of were unacceptable whether they were made in a personal capacity or in the capacity of a Councillor. It was suggested that this potentially provided a perception of being able to avoid censure and the Committee was advised that this was something that was likely to be addressed and clarified within the new Code of Conduct. The Committee welcomed the potential for adoption of a new approach.

The Interim Monitoring Officer undertook to suggest to the newly appointed Monitoring Officer that a report be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee setting out the current legal framework under which the Council was now operating and providing guidance for the Committee. At the same time, there would be an opportunity as well to highlight the different approach understood to be being developed within the new Code.

In the meantime, however, the Committee considered the investigator's report and it was

RESOLVED that the findings and recommendations of the independent investigator relating to the reported complaint be accepted.

Voting: Unanimous.

The meeting ended at 7.00 pm

CHAIRMAN