

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 January 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr C R Bungey – Chairman

Cllr S Baron – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr M Andrews, Cllr A Jones, Cllr C Rigby, Cllr A M Stribley and Mr I Sibley

11. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Filer. Apologies were also received from Independent Persons, Mr P Cashmore and Mr J Storey.

The Monitoring Officer reported the receipt of apologies from Councillor L Lewis who was unable to attend due to a personal bereavement. Councillor G Farquhar attended to answer any questions on her behalf.

12. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

13. Confirmation of Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2019 were confirmed as a correct record.

14. Public Issues

Mr Conor O'Luby made the following statement.

"After a period spanning two years, and following two Ombudsman rulings, BCP Council has admitted to serious failings in the process regarding my complaint against Cllr Mike Greene. Whilst this is to be welcomed, two matters remain of great concern: 1) that no-one is to be held accountable for these failings; 2) that yet again, the new investigation has failed to address the key fact that I was misquoted a number of times. I am thus left doubting whether anything of substance has actually changed, despite promises to the contrary."

15. Consideration of report in respect of complaint about a councillor

Consideration was given to the report and conclusions of an investigation into a complaint relating to Cllr L Lewis and a copy of the appointed Independent Investigator's Report was circulated with the agenda. The Investigator had undertaken a comprehensive appraisal and assessment based upon the current legal framework and the parameters imposed by

the Code of Conduct and including interviews with the complainants and with the councillor concerned.

Cllr Farquhar, on behalf of Cllr Lewis, apologised again on her behalf for unavoidable non-attendance and highlighted that she had sincerely apologised in relation to the matter complained of.

The overall conclusion of the Investigator was that Cllr Lewis had not breached the Code of Conduct because she was not acting in the capacity of a Councillor when she took the action that resulted in the complaints.

Whilst fully accepting the conclusions in this case, consideration was given to the wider issues of how councillors made use of social media. The Chairman reminded members of the useful and informative training which had recently been provided albeit that there had been a low turnout from councillors. The training underlined the importance for councillors of thinking very carefully about the way in which they use social media and the implications of their social media activity. It was suggested that the training session should be repeated on the day of the next Council meeting, immediately before the meeting, and that the Standards Committee should very strongly recommend that all councillors attended.

RESOLVED

(a) That the recommendations of the Independent Investigator into the complaints against Cllr L Lewis and the conclusion that she was not acting in her capacity as a Councillor when she took the action that resulted in the complaints, be accepted and that no further action be taken;

(b) That the previously organised training session on the use by councillors of social media be repeated at a time immediately before a Council meeting and that all Councillors who did not attend on a previous occasion be strongly recommended by the Standards Committee to attend.

Voting: Unanimous

16. Code of Conduct Complaints – Review

The Committee received an update on complaints received regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct against councillors since 1 April 2019. The schedule of items included cases that were closed and those where investigations were pending or on-going. Assurances were provided that complaints were dealt with properly and in accordance with set timelines and processes.

The Committee was reminded of its responsibility for maintaining high standards of conduct by Members of BCP Council and the Town and Parish Councils and for monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct.

It was reported that the exercise of identifying training needs had been undertaken and resulted in the identification of themes which had been addressed through provision of both targeted and generalised training. A full report of training undertaken during the period and levels of attendance would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the outcome of concluded complaints and the progress of those still ongoing be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

17. Declarations of Interest - Guidance Flowchart

In recognition of its responsibility for ethical governance and promoting high standards of conduct, the Committee received a report setting out guidance to assist councillors in determining whether they have a declarable interest in a particular matter and whether their participation at a meeting would be appropriate. It was explained that the matter had been deferred at the previous meeting of the committee to allow the flowchart to be redrafted in consultation with the members of the Committee.

The report sought approval of the revised guidance flowchart and the intention was that the flowchart would be attached to the agenda for all meetings to ensure that councillors were always fully aware of the obligations placed upon them. The Committee welcomed and fully supported this approach.

RESOLVED

That the declaration of interest guidance flowchart be approved and included on all meeting agenda front sheets to serve as a reminder and guidance for councillors and that, in order to point councillors to the flowchart, the wording of the standard agenda item be such as to specifically invite councillors to make any declarations in accordance with and with reference to the flowchart.

The meeting ended at 6.35 pm

CHAIRMAN