

West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee

Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

West Suffolk
working together

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee** held on **Monday 11 December 2017** at **3.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman David Bowman
Vice Chairman John Burns

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Forest Heath District Council

Bob Cockle
Jim Thorndyke

Chris Barker

41. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rona Burt.

42. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes present at the meeting.

43. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from members of the public.

44. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2017 were unanimously accepted by the Committee as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

45. **Update on Standards Activity (Report No: JST/JT/17/003)**

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on current Standards activity across West Suffolk.

It was brought to the Committee's attention that there had been a rise in the amount of complaints received in relation to the use of social media. The Monitoring Officer explained that one of the key factors in the rise was that the relevant individuals were not fully distinguishing their personal profiles

from their professional profiles. Member training and drop-in sessions on standards and social media had recently been offered to all Councillors as an opportunity for them to seek advice on how to use social media effectively.

The Chairman brought to the Committee's attention information that had previously been circulated by the Monitoring Officer in relation to a Government Consultation on the disqualification criteria for Councillors. A response to the consultation was being prepared, however on review, Officers had concerns that one aspect of the proposal, related to the subject of Sexual Risk Orders (SRO), had been understated in the consultation. It was felt that further discussion was required on the subject to provide an adequate response.

The Monitoring Officer explained how an individual might be subject to an SRO and how organisations such as the Council or Political Parties would be able to access such information about an individual.

A discussion was held by the Committee as to how the Council could enhance the nomination process for prospective candidates to ensure they fully understood the qualification criteria they had to meet to stand as a District, Borough or Parish Councillor. It was agreed that the Monitoring Officer would engage with the Elections Manager to find out more information on the nomination process.

The Monitoring Officer also updated the Committee on a recent training event that had been scheduled for Independent Persons. 12 people from various Local Authorities had attended and the feedback had been positive.

Attention was drawn to exempt appendices one and two, which were attached to the agenda. In order to facilitate discussion on these documents the Committee resolved to move into Part 2 of the agenda.

46. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as prescribed in Part 1 Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and indicated against each item.

47. **Update on Standards Activity (Report No: JST/JT/17/003) (Exempt: Paras 1 and 2)**

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the progress of particular Town and Parish Councils in relation to the number and nature of complaints that had been received throughout the year, as well as some recent staff changes.

Members discussed in detail possible actions that the Council could take in an attempt to reduce the amount of Parish and Town Councillor complaints that the Monitoring Officer received. The importance of having an effective Clerk who could assist in resolving minor internal disputes was highlighted, as well as a suggestion that all Parish and Town Councillors should undergo some form of compulsory Standards training during their term of office.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That:-

1. The West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee noted the contents of Report No: JST/JT/17/003;
2. The West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee endorse the proposal to respond to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consultation indicating that individuals subject to a Sexual Risk Order should be restricted from being a Councillor in future. The Monitoring Officer would explore ways to enhance the Council's nomination process to ensure individuals were aware of the disqualification criteria and report back to the Joint Committee at their next meeting.

The Meeting concluded at 4.01 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
