

# West Suffolk Standards Committee

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Standards Committee** held on  
**Monday 15 July 2019 at 3.00 pm in Room GFR-14, West Suffolk House,**  
Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present:

John Augustine

Roger Dicker

Robert Everitt

**In attendance:**

Carol Bull (Portfolio Holder for Governance)

Andy Neal (Committee Substitute Member – Observing)

Margaret Marks

Jim Meikle

Jim Thorndyke

## 1. **Election of Chair for 2019/2020**

This being the first meeting of the West Suffolk Standards Committee since the Authority's Annual Meeting in May 2019, the Monitoring Officer opened the meeting and asked for nominations for the Chair of the Committee for 2019/2020.

Councillor Robert Everitt nominated Councillor Jim Thorndyke as Chair and this was seconded by Councillor Margaret Marks.

There being no other nominations and no objections, it was

### **RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Jim Thorndyke be elected Chair for 2019/2020.

Councillor Thorndyke then took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

## 2. **Election of Vice Chair 2019/2020**

As not all full Members of the Committee were present, the Chair asked the Monitoring Officer if the election of Vice Chair for 2019/2020 could be deferred to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the Standing Orders required for the nomination of Vice-Chair at the first meeting, and therefore it could only be postponed if the Standing Orders were suspended; with more than half of the Members present voting in favour of a formal motion to do so.

Accordingly, Councillor Margaret Marks proposed that Standing Orders be suspended in order to allow the West Suffolk Standards Committee to appoint a Vice Chair for 2019/2020 at a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

This was duly seconded by Councillor Robert Everitt and upon being put to the vote and with 5 voting in favour and with 1 abstention, it was

**RESOLVED:**

That Standing Orders be suspended in order to allow the West Suffolk Standards Committee to appoint a Vice Chair for 2019/2020 at a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

**3. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence received.

Councillor Max Clarke was unable to attend the meeting.

**4. Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

**5. Public Participation**

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

**6. Standards: Procedures for Handling Concerns (Report No: STC/WS/19/001)**

The Monitoring Officer presented this report which sought the Committee's approval of the Standards Procedures for handling concerns, as attached at Appendix A of the report.

Members were also asked to determine and approve a Committee Procedure for considering complaints referred to the Committee, from the two options set out at Appendices B1 and B2.

Some Members of the Committee asked if it would be possible to adopt both Committee Procedures and to utilise the most appropriate based on the case before them. E.g. the 'light touch' version at B1 would be used for less serious cases, with the lengthier version at B2 being utilised for more complex matters.

Both the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer strongly advised against this way forward and stressed the importance of consistency and fairness when considering standards complaints.

Furthermore, it was highlighted to Members that all complainants would view their complaints with equal gravitas, therefore, the Council had to award each with the same level of respect.

Councillor Margaret Marks proposed that the Standards Procedures at Appendix A be adopted, together with the Committee Procedure at Appendix B1 as she considered this to be proportionate to the level of sanctions that the Committee was able to enforce. This was duly seconded by Councillor Roger Dicker.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that if, in the future, the standards regime changed then Members were at liberty to revisit their standards/committee procedures.

Upon being put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**RESOLVED:**

That:-

1. The Standards Procedures for handling concerns, as attached at Appendix A, be agreed; and
2. The Committee Procedure for considering complaints referred to Committee, as attached at Appendix B1, be adopted.

**7. Exclusion of Press and Public**

As the next item on the agenda contained an exempt appendix, it was proposed by Councillor Margaret Marks, seconded by Councillor Jim Meikle and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**RESOLVED:**

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the following items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt categories of information as prescribed in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, and indicated against the items and, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

*(With the acceptance of the Committee, Councillors Carol Bull and Andy Neal remained in the meeting to observe proceedings only.)*

**8. Standards Activity Report (Report No: STC/WS/19/002) (Exempt Appendix A: Paragraphs 1 & 2)**

This report provided the Committee with an update on standards activity. It provided statistics setting out the level of activity within West Suffolk together with any national and local developments.

Discussion took place with regard to the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CfSPL)'s review of ethical standards in local government. The Monitoring Officer explained that the Government's response to the review, and any recommended actions, was expected later in the year. Members were advised that they would be kept updated on any developments in this respect.

Attention was drawn to Paragraph 4.4 of the report which informed the Committee that only a very small number of Parish/Town Councillor

Declaration of Interest forms were still outstanding (following the elections in May 2019). The Monitoring Officer assured the Committee that Democratic Services would chase up those yet to be received.

It was proposed, duly seconded and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**RESOLVED:**

That the content of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 4.25pm

**Signed by:**

**Chair**

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