

West Suffolk Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Standards Committee** held on **Monday 7 December 2020** at **5.00 pm** via Microsoft Teams

Present: **Councillors**

Chair Jim Thorndyke

John Augustine

Roger Dicker

Margaret Marks

Cliff Waterman

In attendance:

Carol Bull (Portfolio Holder for Governance)

7. **Welcome**

The Chair formally commenced the meeting and jointly welcomed all present and those externally viewing the West Suffolk Standards Committee.

A number of housekeeping matters and remote meeting guidance were highlighted to all.

8. **Apologies for absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

Councillors Robert Everitt and Jim Meikle were unable to attend the meeting.

9. **Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

The Democratic Services Officer verbally outlined all Members of the Committee who were present, together with any attending Councillors and the names of the Officers supporting the meeting.

10. **Election of Vice Chair for 2020/2021**

Councillor Cliff Waterman nominated himself as Vice Chair and this was seconded by Councillor Margaret Marks.

There being no other nominations, it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Cliff Waterman be elected Vice Chair for 2020/2021.

11. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 August 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

12. **Declarations of interest**

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

13. **Public participation**

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

14. **Standards Activity Update (Report No: STC/WS/20/002)**

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.

The Monitoring Officer advised Members that following the consultation which took place earlier in the year, on 4 December 2020 the Local Government Association (LGA) had issued a final version of the Model Code of Conduct.

She was pleased to report that the LGA had listened carefully to the consultation and she highlighted specific elements that had been raised by West Suffolk Council in their consultation response and which had now been included in the document.

The Committee was informed that a meeting was due to take place the following week between all Suffolk Monitoring Officers in respect of the LGA's Code.

The Cabinet Member in attendance asked if the Monitoring Officer could seek fellow Suffolk authorities' views on reducing the declaration limit in the LGA code for gifts and hospitality from £50 to £25, as is presently stated in the Suffolk Code.

A number of Members made reference to the difficulty of preconceived bias and public perception; particularly when an elected Member was considering an item at Committee which they had already determined in their parish level capacity.

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee of the training offered to Councillors on this topic and also informed them that the Constitution Review Group was due to consider this matter at their meeting later that week.

Lastly, discussion took place on the volume of recent complaints as set out in the report. Historically, the majority of the complaints had been made by Councillors against their fellow elected Members and the same individuals/councils were disappointingly responsible for a large number of the total.

The Monitoring Officer explained that she repeatedly stressed to the parties concerned the importance of working together for the benefit of the electorate.

The Cabinet Member asked if an additional column could be added to the data table for future reports in order to highlight those cases where a Councillor resigns from office following a complaint.

Related discussion took place on the level of online abuse that Councillors were often subjected to.

The Monitoring Officer explained that she was exploring ways in which support could be offered to Members and how this matter could be included within a Councillor induction programme.

It was proposed by Councillor Margaret Marks, seconded by Councillor Cliff Waterman and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED

That the content of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.48pm

Signed by:

Chair
