

West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee** held on **Thursday 13 April 2017** at **6.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall, IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Forest Heath District Council

John Burns
Jim Thorndyke

Chris Barker
David Bowman

Substitutes attending:

Angela Rushen

Brian Harvey

24. **Election of Chairman for 2016/2017**

This being the first meeting of the West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee since both Authority's Annual Meetings in May 2016, the Monitoring Officer opened the meeting and asked for nominations for the Chairman of the Committee for 2016/2017.

Members were advised that whilst nothing was stipulated in the Terms of Reference, it had been practice since the Joint Committee was formed for the chairmanship to be annually rotated between the two authorities. The chairmanship for 2015/2016 had been held by St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Councillor Jim Thorndyke nominated Councillor David Bowman as Chairman and this was seconded by Councillor Chris Barker.

There being no other nominations, the motion was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Bowman be elected Chairman for 2016/2017.

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

25. **Election of Vice-Chairman for 2016/2017**

The Chairman requested nominations for the election of the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee.

Councillor Brian Harvey nominated Councillor John Burns as Vice-Chairman and this was seconded by Councillor Chris Barker.

There being no other nominations, the motion was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That Councillor John Burns be elected Vice-Chairman for 2016/2017.

26. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rona Burt (FHDC) and Bob Cockle (SEBC).

27. **Substitutes**

Councillor Brian Harvey attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Rona Burt and Councillor Angela Rushen attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Bob Cockle.

28. **Public Participation**

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

29. **Minutes**

On consideration of the minutes of the meeting held on 19 August 2015 Councillor John Burns raised a question with regard to Minute Number 23. (Code of Conduct Investigation) and asked if the Councillor in question had received the necessary training.

The Monitoring Officer explained that as she was new to the role and had not been employed by the West Suffolk Councils in 2015 she was unaware if the training had been undertaken. Accordingly, she would look into this matter and would send a response to all Members of the Joint Committee by email.

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 August 2015 were then unanimously accepted by the Committee as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

30. **Appointment of Independent Person(s) (Report No: STD/JT/17/001)**

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that in June 2014 the West Suffolk Councils had jointly appointed two Independent Persons (Mr Arnold Barrow and Mrs Joy Inameti) under the Localism Act 2011; in order for their views to be sought and taken into account before a decision was made on an

allegation that a District, Borough, Parish or Town Councillor had breached the Code of Conduct.

These two appointments were now due to expire and the purpose of the report was to seek the endorsement of the Joint Committee for the necessary recruitment process.

Members were advised that Mrs Inameti had decided to stand down from the role due to work commitments. However, Mr Barrow had indicated that he would be happy to continue for a further term, and it was for Members to decide if they wished to agree this.

The Joint Committee was asked to give consideration to the recruitment process in respect of the proposed timetable (as set out in Paragraph 1.1.8 of the report) and to advise of their preference for a payment structure for the Independent Persons.

In response to questions posed by Members, the Monitoring Officer advised that there was the option to use a national company to assist with the recruitment and any subsequent training of candidates. And it would be made clear within the advert that candidates were being sought who were locally based to West Suffolk.

It was proposed by Councillor Jim Thorndyke, duly seconded by Councillor David Bowman and it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

That:-

1. The process to appoint the Independent Person, as outlined in Paragraph 1.1.8, be agreed subject to:
 - I. The Vice-Chairman also being involved in the interview process; and
 - II. The West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee being advised of the recommendations for appointment by way of email, therefore negating the need to convene a meeting of the Joint Committee in w/c 29 May 2017.
2. The payment scheme be amended to a set annual rate of £25.00 per hour, with a maximum 4 hour (£100) cap; able to be extended at the discretion of the Service Manager (Democratic Services)/Monitoring Officer.
3. Mr Arnold Barrow be re-appointed as an Independent Person for a further term, under the new payment scheme (Recommendation 2 above).

31. **Standards Regime and the Joint Committee (Verbal)**

In light of the West Suffolk Joint Standards Committee not having met since August 2015 the Chairman permitted this verbal item to be discussed at the meeting.

Members raised concern that the Joint Committee had not met for nearly 2 years, as a result of which they felt they had a distinct lack of awareness of standards complaints within West Suffolk.

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Joint Committee that they had very little sanctions at their disposal under the new Standards Regime. And, as agreed by the Joint Committee in 2012 when it was formed, the process was for the Monitoring Officer to try to resolve most cases locally via the Independent Person.

Members were informed that the majority of complaints related to Town/Parish Councillors and not District/Borough. The Monitoring Officer advised the Joint Committee of an ongoing matter concerning Brandon Town Council (which was in the public domain) and agreed to update Members on this at their next meeting in June, together with a summary report of all other ongoing cases.

The Monitoring Officer also explained that she was in the process of reviewing the two West Suffolk Authorities' Constitutions in order to align elements such as the Members' Code of Conduct. This would be the subject of future reports.

Councillor Jim Thorndyke raised concern at some of the Declarations of Interest from Parish/Town Councillors which he believed were missing information. The Monitoring Officer explained that she intended to raise this at the next meetings of the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Parish Forums, and she would also raise it with SALC.

RESOLVED:

The verbal update/discussion was noted.

The meeting concluded at 6.46 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
